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The Doctrine of Sin in the Thought of George R. Knight: Its Context and Implications

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ABSTRACT

THE DOCTRINE OF SIN IN THE THOUGHT OF GEORGE R. KNIGHT:

ITS CONTEXT AND IMPLICATIONS

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George R. Knight attempts to chart a middle course between various historical extremes on the doctrine of sin. His view of the Fall and of the consequent effects on human nature is not as pessimistic as that of theologians in the Augustinian tradition (including Martin Luther and John Calvin), who stress the complete corruption of human nature and the loss of free will. On the other hand, Knight's view is not as optimistic as the views of such theologians as Pelagius or M. L. Andreasen, who tend not to see the Fall as having affected human nature itself, and believe as a result that humans have full potential for overcoming sin. Knight's view falls in the middle, in that he holds to the corruption of human nature, yet continues to espouse human free will.

Knight's moderate position on sin leads him to a moderate view of salvation and perfection: He stresses the utter helplessness of humanity in the face of sin and human beings' complete incapacity to contribute anything to their own salvation. Simultaneously, however, he maintains that a necessary part of the process of salvation is the responsive cooperation of individuals with God. As a corollary, he also maintains that perfection is, in a sense, both possible and necessary. Unlike Andreasen, to whose writings he is most directly responding, Knight denies that human beings can ever achieve absolute sinlessness on this earth; Knight does believe, however, that they can develop an attitude of perfect willingness to do God's will. It is the divergences in the doctrine of sin that lead directly to the differences in the theologies of salvation and perfection of Knight and Andreasen.

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Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary

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A Thesis

Presented in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

As a retired professor of church history at the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary at Andrews University and the author of over thirty books, George R. Knight is a highly influential historian within the Seventh-day Adventist denomination. His writings on Adventist heritage and on the role of Ellen G. White within the church have impacted a large segment of the membership of the denomination, given that Knight's books on these topics are written in a popular style accessible to a lay audience.

Although Knight is a historian and held the position of professor of church history, he has also written a considerable amount of material on theology, and he stands as a theologian in his own right. One of the theological topics on which he has written the most, and which have had wide impact, are his writings on sin, salvation, and perfection. The fundamental theme that permeates Knight's writings on salvation is his reaction against legalism, a problem that has plagued the Christian church ever since its inception and continues to threaten the Adventist denomination today. Having gone through a very legalistic and pharisaical phase in his own Christian experience, Knight is highly concerned now to stress that salvation does not come through works or obedience to the law, but as a gift.

According to Knight, the tendency to legalism arises from an insufficient view of the nature, power, and universality of sin. Specifically, he sees a danger in atomizing sin and treating sin as if it were merely a series of specific acts. If sin is atomized, it is possible to think that righteousness also is merely a series of particular acts. The real problem of sin, however, runs much deeper, according to Knight. Sinfulness is a state of being, not just an act, and it is this *state* of sin that produces particular *acts* of sin. Aiming to eliminate the specific acts of sin will never solve the root problem, which is the bent within human nature toward evil.

For obvious reasons, Knight's doctrine of sin has critical implications for his doctrine of salvation. This is to be expected, for one's understanding of the predicament of the sinner will directly determine what kind of salvation and what kind of savior are needed. Given that Knight's view of sin heavily impacts his understanding of justification, sanctification, and perfection, his writings on the topic of sin deserve careful consideration.

Statement of the Problem

Since no careful study of George R. Knight's doctrine of sin has been done, this thesis aims to study the context, significance, and implications of Knight's theology of sin. In particular, it will focus on three questions: (1) How does Knight's doctrine of sin compare to other historical Christian theologies of sin? (2) What are the key points of Knight's own doctrine of sin? (3) What impact does Knight's doctrine of sin have on his understanding of justification, sanctification, and perfection?

Justification for Study

The most significant reason why a study of Knight's views is needed is that his writings are so popular and influential. As a prolific author, Knight has reached a large segment of the Adventist denomination with his views, and his concepts of sin and salvation have had widespread impact. Yet there are no comprehensive academic evaluations of his writings on salvation.

A second reason to focus on Knight's views of sin and salvation is that his positions are quite controversial in some Adventist circles. Many within the Adventist denomination fear that his view of salvation undermines the importance of the law and of observance of God's commands. They believe Knight cheapens salvation and inappropriately detracts attention from the standard of perfection to which Christians are called. Given the controversy that surrounds his views, some analysis of his theology is needed.

The major reason for isolating Knight's view of sin for particular study is that his doctrine of sin is the foundation of his doctrine of salvation, as mentioned earlier. It is his view of the nature and extent of sin that necessitates his particular view of the law and determines his doctrines of justification and sanctification. Thus, a study of his doctrine of sin is an important aspect of evaluating his doctrine of salvation as well.

Methodology

This study will be divided into three major parts covering, respectively, the context, significance, and implications of Knight's doctrine of sin.

Chapter 2 (context) will concentrate on providing background for Knight's views by offering an overview of various possible understandings of sin. It will summarize the two major streams of thought in Christian theology with respect to sin, explaining differing definitions of sin and outlining divergent views on the nature and universality of sin and the extent and effects of the Edenic Fall. This section of the study will summarize the views of Augustine of Hippo, Pelagius, Martin Luther, John Calvin, and M. L. Andreasen, explaining how each understood sin and its effects. Such an overview will provide a context in which to place Knight and a set of alternative views against which his theology can be compared.

Chapter 3 (significance) will focus on explicating Knight's own doctrine of sin. This section of the study will give special attention to his definition of sin and the reasons for it. It will also explain his understanding of the extent of the Fall and its effects on human nature.

Chapter 4 (implications) will explain the significance of Knight's doctrine of sin for the rest of his doctrine of salvation. It will discuss how his understanding of sin necessitates a particular view of justification and sanctification, and will also explain the implications for his understanding of the demand of perfection in the life of the believer. This section will shed light on the controversial matter of whether or not Knight's view of sin undermines the significance of the law and sets aside the necessity of obedience to the law in the life of a believer.

CHAPTER II

HISTORICAL CHRISTIAN VIEWS ON THE NATURE, EXTENT, AND EFFECTS OF SIN

Introduction

All the religions and philosophies of the world agree on the fact that something is fundamentally wrong with humanity. Christianity names the defect "sin" and attributes it to an Edenic Fall; some religions suggest that humans are at odds with the cosmic order; still other religions, such as Hinduism, describe the problem with humanity in terms of pollution. All acknowledge, however, that the human race is flawed; something is awry somewhere within the human person. The problem comprehended in the Christian doctrine of sin, in other words, "is not an esoteric, in-house, intramural Christian topic," but rather a problem universally acknowledged.[1]

Despite general agreement on the fact that there is a problem within the human race, there is very little agreement on the precise nature of the problem, even among Christians. Indeed, Christian theologians through the centuries have taken widely different stances regarding the topic of sin. Their disagreements center

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[1] Bernard Ramm, *Offense to Reason: A Theology of Sin* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1985), 36.

on three central questions regarding, respectively, the nature of sin, the results of the Fall, and the nature of the sinful inheritance passed on to each human being from generation to generation.

The Central Questions with Respect to Sin

First, what is the nature or essence of sin? Some understand sin primarily as a series of discrete acts, but see these as freely chosen. Those who take this view do not conceive of sin as resulting from an inherently flawed sinful nature; they argue that human nature itself was not corrupted by the introduction of sin into the world. Rather, human beings consciously choose to commit particular acts of sin. Others, however, understand sin primarily as a condition and a state of being. In this view, human beings are universally characterized by a corrupted nature and are thus "sinful," regardless of whether or not they have committed *actual* sin. It is this sinfulness of nature that leads them to commit particular acts of sin.

Second, what are the results of the Edenic Fall? How extensive was the Fall, and what effect did it have on the human will? Christians agree that human nature is in some sense fallen since Adam and Eve's sin, but there is considerable disagreement over whether the original sin resulted in the loss of free will for the human race. Some argue that the Fall had a relatively mild effect on human nature: Though it may have weakened the will and engrained in human nature a propensity or tendency toward sin, nevertheless the Fall did not destroy free will, nor did it destroy the image of God in humanity. In this view, human beings retain the freedom to resist and overcome sin. Others, however, maintain that sin entirely defaced the image of God from human beings, resulting in the complete corruption

of the human will. With the will in bondage to sin, human beings are compelled to sin and no longer have the ability to choose not to sin.

Third, with what "original sin" are human beings born? To state the question another way, what "taint" do Adam's descendants inherit from him? Christian theologians generally agree that all human beings are born with some type of original sin (that is, some type of sinful inheritance from Adam and Eve), but theologians disagree on what exactly this inheritance entails. There are substantial differences of opinion on the meaning of original sin and on the precise way in which Adam and Eve's sin affects their posterity. Thus another way to pose the question would be to ask, in what sense is sin heritable? Some suggest that the major consequence of the Fall inherited by Adam and Eve's posterity is physical death and moral weakness; others suggest that the inheritance includes not just moral weakness, but total corruption of the moral nature. Theologians also differ on whether or not guilt is heritable: Do Adam and Eve's descendents share in the pair's guilt for their original sin? In other words, are human beings guilty only for their own personal sins, or are they guilty also for the inherited sinful nature with which they are born? The disagreement centers on whether or not sin and guilt can actually be transmitted from one human being to another and from one generation to another, or if sin and guilt can reside solely with the sinner himself.

Two General Positions Regarding Sin

Severe View

Christian theologians can be roughly divided into two general camps with respect to their views on sin. On one hand, some theologians tend to take a

relatively severe view of sin and have a much more pessimistic view of human nature as a result. Such theologians hold to the complete corruption of the human will after the Fall, denying that humanity retains the freedom not to sin. These theologians tend to see sin as a state of being, as something which pervades and corrupts the entire human nature. Thus even infants are depraved and sinful because of their depraved natures, regardless of whether or not they have ever committed a particular *act* of sin. In this view, Adam and Eve's corrupted nature is heritable, and Adam's descendents are therefore liable for his sin and guilt, apart from whether or not they themselves have sinned.

Mild View

Theologians on the other side take a milder view of sin and consequently have a relatively optimistic view of human nature. These theologians tend to stress the freedom of human will even after the Fall, suggesting that though human nature might be weakened as a result of Adam's sin, it is still possible to resist sin. In this view, a person is held guilty for sin only when he or she commits particular sinful actions. Thus, theologians in this category tend to understand sin primarily as a series of acts (which can be resisted and overcome), rather than as a state of nature (which could not be overcome through force of will). These more optimistic theologians deny that sin and guilt can be inherited from Adam and Eve, arguing that no individual can be held responsible for another's sin. At most, the heritable consequences of Adam's sin are physical corruption and death, along with a tendency toward sin, but sin and guilt are not themselves capable of being passed from generation to generation.

The purpose of the present chapter is to survey these two contrasting approaches to the doctrine of sin in the history of Christianity in order to provide context for George Knight's particular conception of sin. The chapter will examine the views of Augustine of Hippo (354-430), and the two most significant theologians of the Protestant Reformation, Martin Luther (1483-1546), and John Calvin (1509-1564), as key historical representatives of those who take a severe view of sin and its effects. As representatives of the second category of theologians, those who take a milder view of sin, we will consider the views of Pelagius (c. 360-c. 420), Augustine's fourth-century opponent, and M. L. Andreasen (1876-1962), the most influential Adventist theologian of the 1930s and 40s and the theologian to whom Knight's views most directly respond. The focus of this examination will be on these four theologians' differing views of the nature of sin, results, and heritability of sin, with an eye to establishing in chapter 2 how Knight's views compare.

Augustine

In tracing the development of the Christian doctrine of sin, historians frequently divide their histories into three parts: the epoch before Augustine, the life of Augustine himself, and development after Augustine. Such a division is certainly justified, given that Augustine stands, in the words of N. P. Williams, "like a Colossus upon a mountain crest, marking the watershed between the ancient and modern worlds" and introducing a pivotal stage in the development of the doctrine of sin.[2] Prior to Augustine, the nature of sin and the effects of the Edenic Fall had been

[2] Norman Powell Williams, *The Ideas of the Fall and of Original Sin: A Historical and Critical Study* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1927), 170.

discussed by church theologians, but the ideas of the Fall and the notion of a taint in human nature inherited from Adam existed only in vague and undefined shape.[3] These teachings had not been seen as core doctrines of the Christian faith or as "belonging to the essence of the Christian message," but rather were treated as presuppositions and corollaries, as beliefs less definite and widely accepted than the more central doctrines. As a result of Augustine's influence, however, the doctrines of the Fall and of original sin (that is, an inherited moral corruption transmitted from Adam to all human beings) became "permanently embedded in the main fabric" of Christian thought.[4]

Though Augustine represents a pivotal stage in the development of the doctrine of sin, his thinking was not entirely unique to him, for prior theologians had laid the groundwork for the basic notion that human beings are universally in a condition of bondage to sin, and that they are born in such a sinful state because of the transmission of Adam's sinful nature to all his posterity. Yet though other theologians had provided some of Augustine's essential ideas, still the bishop of Hippo synthesized and systematized the thinking of his predecessors in a way that had never been done. Indeed, he is the first figure in the history of Christian thought to introduce the phrase "original sin" (*originale peccatum*), referring to the sinful

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[3] Among those early theologians who made substantial contributions to the doctrine of sin, and on whom Augustine would later draw, were Irenaeus of Lyons, Gregory of Nyssa, Tertullian, and Ambrose of Milan.

[4] Williams, 317-8.

condition in which all human beings are born.[5] Thus, even if he did not invent the doctrine of original sin, his articulation of this doctrine nevertheless "drove the Pauline material and subsequent tradition to what he saw as their ultimate conclusions."[6]

Key to the development of Augustine's idea of sin was his personal experience of the power of sin in his own life. Throughout his youth and young adulthood, before his conversion to Christianity, Augustine led a licentious lifestyle and felt keenly his inability to overcome lust and sexual desire. He writes in his autobiographical *Confessions* of the "stormy waves" that plagued his youth:

> Clouds of muddy carnal concupiscence filled the air. The bubbling impulses of puberty befogged and obscured my heart so that it could not see the difference between love's serenity and lust's darkness. Confusion of the two things boiled within me. It seized hold of my youthful weakness sweeping me through the precipitous rocks of desire to submerge me in a whirlpool of vice.[7]

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[5] The term "original sin" is somewhat nebulous, and it is not obvious at first glance whether it refers to Adam's original sin, to the sinful state in which infants are born, or to guilt for that sinful state. According to Williams, the phrase was used by Augustine to refer to "a sinful quality which is born with us and is inherent in our constitution" (Williams, 328). For Augustine, however, this sinful quality was closely connected with original guilt. Tatha Wiley clarifies that "Augustine's distinction between the event of Adam's original sin (*peccatum originale originans*) and the condition of original sin in which infants are born (*peccatum originale originatum*) became a permanent feature of the doctrines of original sin and redemption. In the early church, as today, reference to the 'problem of original sin' refers to the sinful state brought about by Adam's sin, *peccatum originale originatum*" (Tatha Wiley, *Original Sin: Origins, Developments, Contemporary Meanings* [New York: Paulist Press, 2002], 72).

[6] Edwin Harry Zackrison, *Seventh-day Adventists and Original Sin: A Study of the Early Development of the Seventh-day Adventist Understanding of the Effects of Adam's Sin on His Posterity* (Ph.D. dissertation, Andrews University, 1984), 107.

[7] St. Augustine, *Confessions*, Oxford World's Classics, trans. and with an intro. and notes by Henry Chadwick (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 24.

Augustine describes the acute inner conflict he suffered leading up to his conversion as a result of having two wills at work within him: one willing to do evil and the other willing to do good. He explicitly identifies himself with the Apostle Paul's sentiment: "I can will what is right, but I cannot do it. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do" (Rom 7:18-19). Augustine's sense of his own human weakness decidedly influenced his later theology, leading him to develop a doctrine of sin that stressed humanity's moral impotence, weakness of will, and complete dependence on God's grace as the only solution to the problem of sin.[8] His intention, according to Vandervelde, was "to depict man as being so deeply enmeshed in sin that his only hope of salvation is the forgiving and redeeming grace that appeared in Jesus Christ."[9]

A second major factor influencing Augustine's doctrine of sin was the already established practice of infant baptism. Augustine accepted this practice as legitimate, but it had to be justified on some grounds.[10] For Augustine, the fact of infant baptism meant that human beings must have some inborn sin, even from birth, for why else should the infant need baptism, given that he or she has not even had opportunity to commit actual sin? Therefore Augustine concluded that infants

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[8] David L. Smith, *With Willful Intent: A Theology of Sin* (Wheaton, IL: BridgePoint, 1994), 36.

[9] G. Vandervelde, *Original Sin: Two Major Trends in Contemporary Roman Catholic Reinterpretation* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1975), 14.

[10] Eugene TeSelle, *Augustine*, Abingdon Pillars of Theology (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2006), 37.

are born with an inherited sinfulness and an accompanying inherited guilt, both stemming from Adam's transgression.

According to N. P. Williams, Augustine's thought regarding original sin can be summed up in three points: original righteousness, original sin in the sense of inherited moral impotence, and original sin in the sense of inherited guilt. The first point describes the condition of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. The original pair was characterized by a perfect orientation toward God and his will, and a perfect inclination to do good. The two had perfect freedom, which consisted of the ability to choose the good and the ability not to sin (*posse non peccare*).

Though Adam's will was naturally oriented toward the good, he nevertheless chose willfully and obstinately to exercise his free will and sin. At this point, the human will became corrupted; human nature was now inclined to sin and now suffered under the tyranny of "concupiscence," which for Augustine meant the inclination to turn from God to find satisfaction in creatures.[11] Concupiscence and the inclination toward sin, though not properly sin in themselves, were an effect of, and punishment for, original sin.[12] Whereas before, Adam had possessed the ability

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[11] Williams, 365.

[12] Actually, it is not precisely clear in Augustine's thought whether or not concupiscence is properly sin, and whether or not it brings with it guilt. According to Williams, Augustine's early writings, at least, imply that concupiscence in itself renders an individual guilty, apart from whether or not the individual has committed actual sin. However, Williams acknowledges that Augustine draws a distinction, albeit an abstruse one, between sin and concupiscence. According to Tatha Wiley, concupiscence in Augustine's understanding *inclines* one to sin, but is not sin itself. Regardless of whether or not Augustine understood concupiscence as sin, strictly speaking, the line between the two is a fine one in Augustine's thought. At the least, Williams is correct that original sin (understood as the tendency toward

not to sin (*posse non peccare*), the disorder of concupiscence meant that he was now unable not to sin (*non posse non peccare*). Nor did this disorder affect Adam alone: It was also transmitted to his posterity. Augustine's predecessors had provided him with the idea of a biological inheritance of moral weakness, which he readily adopted; thus, in his view, the sinful nature characterized by moral impotence is transmitted to every human individual since Adam through the act of procreation.[13] Though guilt for sin may be washed away through baptism, original sin with its attendant inclination toward evil will remain even after baptism. In this manner Augustine emphasized sin as a condition, not just as an act.[14]

Along with this disordered will and the moral impotence it entails, Adam's sin brought another effect on the human race: that of guilt for sin. Thus, not only do human beings experience moral weakness as a result of Adam's sin, but they also suffer legal liability for Adam's sin. This is due to the fact that all of humankind was in some sense included in Adam at the time of the Fall. The entire future human race was implicit in him, and hence all of Adam's posterity is held guilty for a sin in which they had no personal responsibility. [15] In this way, Augustine took the view that *original* sin (Adam's sin, by which all are contaminated through biological

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sin) is always closely associated with original guilt for Augustine (Williams, 328; Wiley, 64, 89).

[13] Wiley, 61.

[14] Smith, 36.

[15] Significantly, the Augustinian notion that all sinned "in Adam" is based in part on Ambrosiaster, who based his understanding on the Latin Vulgate's mistranslation of Rom 5:12 ("in whom all sinned") (Wiley, 61-62).

transmission) incurs guilt just as much as *actual* sin.[16] It is this aspect of Augustine's thought which led him to espouse the belief that unbaptized infants must face damnation.

One feature of Augustine's thought remains to be clarified: namely, in what sense human beings retain free will after the Fall. As Williams notes, Augustine maintains that free will continues to exist even after the Fall, but now it is in bondage to sin. He explains Augustine as follows: "The will of fallen man is free, but in point of fact it always freely chooses evil under the overwhelming influence of concupiscence, or of the devil's power."[17] In other words, there is no neutrality toward sin, for though we sin willfully, we are unable *not* to sin. Williams concludes, "The Augustinian system implies the negation of free-will in any except a highly recondite and unnatural sense of the term."[18]

The key feature of the Augustinian view, then, is Augustine's notion of sin as a matter of nature, not just an act. In his understanding, the sin of Adam fundamentally altered human nature and brought about a condition of moral impotence, which has been biologically transmitted to the entire human race through procreation. But it is not only sinful tendencies that are transmitted, for the second key feature of Augustine's view is that Adam's posterity also inherits the

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[16] Henri Blocher, *Original Sin: Illuminating the Riddle*, New Studies in Biblical Theology, ed. D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1997), 19.

[17] Williams, 369.

[18] Ibid., 370.

guilt for his sin due to their physiological inclusion in him at the Fall. Thus he maintains not just the heritability of sinful tendencies, but also the heritability of legal liability. The third and final key feature of Augustine's doctrine is his denial (for all practical purposes) of free will, given that the will is in bondage to sin.

Somewhat surprisingly, Augustine's view prevailed over the next centuries, despite the fact that it contradicted several centuries of previous theological tradition.[19] At the Councils of Carthage (411-418) and Orange (529), patristic debates over the nature of sin ended, for the councils confirmed as normative Christian belief the teaching that infants are born with Adam's sin.[20]

Pelagius

Though Augustine's views eventually triumphed in the Western Christian church, Augustine was not without opponents. Chief among those who took exception to his doctrine of sin was Pelagius, a British monk and theologian. It is sometimes assumed, partly because Augustine himself gives this impression, that Augustine developed his ideas in reaction to Pelagius, though in fact the essential outline of both men's views of original sin were in place before they ever came into contact with each other.[21] Unfortunately for Pelagius, when the conflict between his own doctrine of sin and Augustine's doctrine came to a head, Pelagius's views were condemned in the decisions of the councils of Carthage and Orange. Despite the fact

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[19] Smith, 40.

[20] Wiley, 72-73.

[21] Ibid., 67.

that Pelagius meant to be and believed himself to be an orthodox Christian, his name has been synonymous with heresy ever since.[22]

A key event in the development of Pelagius's thinking on the subjects of sin, free will, and grace was his journey to Rome at the beginning of the fifth century. There he encountered a Christian church that had been inundated with pagan converts who had seriously affected the church's moral standards. Appalled at the indulgence of the Roman believers, Pelagius set about attempting reform, "denouncing the sins of society and inculcating a highly ethical and puritan type religion."[23] Such an approach had significant implications for Pelagius's doctrine of sin, for it necessitated a strong belief in the freedom of the will. Any recognition of the frailty of the will in such circumstances would merely legitimate sin.

Thus the driving motive behind Pelagius's theology was his desire to avoid any doctrine of sin that would grant license to sin or that would undermine human responsibility for transgression. It was unthinkable that a believer could claim that human nature compelled him or her to sin, for this would spur moral irresponsibility by making sin appear unavoidable. Were Augustine's ideas true about the moral incapacity of human nature, there would be no sense in demanding a converted life. "Therefore," explains Berkhouwer, "Pelagius wished to accentuate

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[22] Williams, 338.

[23] Ibid., 333.

the responsibility of man in his sinful activity; he wanted to eliminate the possibility that man might escape responsibility by pointing to his own sinful character."[24] Human beings could not be allowed to excuse themselves on the basis of any pre-existing guilt or corruption; thus Pelagius stressed the point that human beings sin not because of weakness or inherited sinfulness, but because they *choose* to sin.

Conflict with Augustine was bound to ensue, when once the two had encountered each other's ideas. Such an encounter occurred when one day an unnamed bishop quoted to Pelagius a line found more than once in Augustine's *Confessions*, in which Augustine asked of God, "Grant what you command, and command what you will."[25] From Pelagius's point of view, such a prayer was unacceptable. God does not require what he has not already provided the capacity to do. Not that God's grace is unnecessary; far from it. But "for Pelagius, God's primary gift of grace is moral nature itself (*bonum naturae*). . . . Choosing and doing the good do not require a further gift of divine assistance."[26] God's grace is necessary, but his grace is to grant freedom of the will.

Indeed, for Pelagius, human freedom is essential to human nature. Freedom of the will is not a gift given by God to humanity over and above what is required by nature; rather, it is essential to being human. According to Berkhouwer, "Pelagius . . . took his point of departure in a naïve interpretation of man's freedom, which he

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[24] G. C. Berkhouwer, *Sin*, Studies in Dogmatics (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1971), 431.

[25] E.g., Augustine, 202, 216.

[26] Wiley, 68.

assumed to belong to every man's essence. Therefore freedom could not be lost without man's *ceasing to be man*."[27] For this reason, it was impossible that Adam should have lost this trait in the Fall.

The essential idea of Pelagius, then, is that "human nature is and remains basically good."[28] Whereas Augustine had denied that human beings any longer have the ability not to sin, Pelagius maintained that Adam's posterity still retain their ability to choose between good and evil. Indeed, they even have the capacity to attain perfect sinlessness.[29] After all, if humanity did not have the potential for avoiding the wrong, then God could not justly hold them accountable for their sin. Thus, whereas Augustine perceived sin as resulting from the rule of concupiscence, from the misdirected condition of the human nature, Pelagius presents sin "as the free act of man himself *within his own responsibility*."[30]

Pelagius therefore espouses what Berkhouwer terms an "actualistic" view of sin, meaning that Pelagius detaches sin from humanity's pervasive inclination to sin and perceives sin as a concrete act, not a condition or state of being.[31] In his view, Adam's act of sin might have produced certain consequences for himself, namely banishment from the Garden of Eden, but it could not affect his human nature, and it

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[27] Berkouwer, 430.

[28] Vandervelde, 10.

[29] Ibid.

[30] Berkhouwer, 432, emphasis original.

[31] Berkhouwer, 432.

certainly did not affect the nature of his descendents, who are born into the world morally neutral.[32] Even if freedom of the will becomes encumbered by influence or force of habit, the will still remains free. In this manner, Pelagius became "the great antagonist of the doctrine of original sin," rejecting not only Augustine's notion of an inheritance of guilt from Adam, but also his opponent's notion of an inherited tendency toward sin.[33]

Of course, if human beings are born morally neutral, as Pelagius suggested, the obvious question concerns why it is that all human beings have sinned. For Pelagius, the universality of sin was real, and its power over humankind was equally real, but was due to custom and imitation, not to biological inheritance of a sinful nature from Adam.[34] Pelagius insisted resolutely that sin arises from the will, not

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[32] Though Pelagius did comprehend some consequences of Adam's sin for Adam himself, Pelagius did not believe physical death was one of these consequences. In his view, Adam and his descendents would have died regardless of whether or not sin had been introduced into the world. Though moral nature was part of the essence of human nature, immortality was not (Williams, 340).

[33] Berkhouwer, 430. Pelagius, like Augustine, accepted the practice of infant baptism, but justified it on a different basis, namely that it enabled infants to participate in the kingdom of God (Wiley, 69).

[34] Williams suggests that Pelagius held to an entirely "immutable" view of free will, and that he "den[ied] the existence of any such thing as the tyranny of habit. A man may commit a sin one hundred times, and yet after the hundredth sin he is no more inclined to commit it, his will is no more biassed [*sic*] or trammeled than it was before he began the series of sinful acts" (Williams, 341).

However, according to Vandervelde, who follows Gisbert Gresheke on this point, it is incorrect to assume that Pelagius's imitation theory means that he is oblivious to the power of sin. On the contrary, Pelagius understood that when Adam sinned, the image of God was obscured as the image of Adam eclipsed it. Man's ability to discern between right and wrong has fallen into oblivion, which, as Vandervelde explains it, "changes the concrete situation for posterity. Man does not simply confront this situation as an external reality that he comes upon in his free

from one's nature.[35]

Though the views of Pelagius and his followers were denounced in the fifth and sixth centuries, the general tenets of Pelagianism have enjoyed revivals at later points in history. For example, Herman Bavinck identifies the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries as a period in which Pelagianism again became popular, consistent with the emphasis of that age on the essential goodness of man.[36] Berkhouwer concludes that though Pelagianism was condemned, it "has always exerted a profound and a very lasting influence."[37]

Martin Luther and John Calvin

Though Augustine's views initially triumphed over those of Pelagius, and though Augustine provided the major doctrinal inheritance of the Middle Ages, Augustine's thinking on sin was revised considerably by medieval theologians, especially during the Scholastic period. Beginning with Thomas Aquinas, the theologians of the later medieval period mitigated some of the harshness of Augustine's doctrine, especially with regard to the depravity of human nature and

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decisions; rather, this situation confronts man as a magnitude that precedes and qualifies his free decisions, a present dynamic that leads him to sin." Because of this dynamic, according to Pelagius's thought, sin through force of habit achieves power akin to that of nature. Obviously, then, Pelagius has some sense of the overwhelming power of sin over the human will, an understanding that mitigates his seemingly naïve insistence on the utter freedom of the will (Vandervelde, 11-12).

[35] Smith, 40.

[36] Herman Bavinck, quoted in Berkouwer, 430.

[37] Berkouwer, 430.

the judgment of unbaptized infants.[38] Gradually, according to Zackrison, Catholicism "settled into a posture, with regard to soteriology and hamartiology, that has been rightly termed Semi-Pelagian," in that it stressed the weakness of the will and the diseased nature inherited from Adam, but not the completely mortified will of Augustine.[39] By the end of the fourteenth century, "the mantle of rigid Augustinianism had been rejected by Catholicism. It remained to be donned and maintained by the Reformers, especially John Calvin and his followers."[40]

If the end of the Middle Ages saw a softening of Augustine's doctrine of sin, the Protestant Reformers of the sixteenth century renewed all the aspects of Augustinianism that had been compromised. Dissatisfied with the Semi-Pelagianism espoused by the Catholic Church, the leaders of the Reformation re-embraced and even strengthened the Augustinian view of original sin, which was included in the major Protestant confessions of faith.[41] Their basic position was that Adam's original sin resulted in hereditary depravity and corruption of the human nature;

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[38] Zackrison, 132.

[39] Ibid., 125, 127. Though the councils of Carthage and Orange condemned Pelagianism, the canons propounded at these councils nevertheless employ Semi-Pelagian vocabulary, according to Vandervelde. The canons could be interpreted as saying that man's will was merely weakened. Thus there is some disagreement on whether the Council of Orange rejected Semi-Pelagianism unambiguously (Vandervelde, 23-25).

[40] Smith, 63.

[41] Blocher, 15.

they also held, in contrast to some of the medieval theologians, that the inclination to sin was in itself sin.[42]

According to Williams, the differences between Martin Luther and John Calvin, the two most significant theologians of the Reformation, are inconsiderable as far as the doctrine of original sin is concerned. Thus it is possible, he suggests, "to state the Fall-theory [that was] characteristic of the Reformation as a single dogmatic scheme." The foundation of this scheme was the denial of the Scholastic distinction in the late medieval era between the supposedly "superabundant" gifts of human nature in the state of original righteousness and the "essential" qualities belonging to the essence of human nature. The Scholastics tended to view humankind as having lost in the Fall certain superabundant gifts given to Adam (such as immortality), but not as having lost the essential traits of human nature. This distinction had allowed a relatively mild doctrine of the Fall and its effects. The Reformers, however, took exception to this position. They denied that human nature had merely "been stripped of some adventitious splendours," insisting instead that it had been corrupted in essence. For them, according to Williams, "the Fall was not a fall from supernature to mere nature, as the [Scholastics] had taught, but from

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[42] Zackrison, 140. The exception to the general tendency of the Reformers to embrace Augustinianism was in the Radical Reformation. According to Zackrison, there are clear parallels in some Anabaptist theologians (Hubmaier, Felbinger, Stadler, and the Hutterite *Handbuchlein wider den Prozess*) to Pelagianism. For instance, they denied total depravity, argued that inborn sinfulness is not an unconquerable barrier, held that children are born pure and innocent, rejected the idea that original sin in itself results in condemnation, and maintained that participation in Adam's sin happens by imitation, not imputation or natural propagation. "In short, Anabaptism took a very hopeful view of man and had no doctrine of original sin as traditionally understood" (ibid., 167).

mere nature to sub-nature." In this manner, the Reformers emphasized the total corruption wrought by the Fall. [43]

Though the theologies of sin of Luther and Calvin are very close, Luther's is in William's estimation the more pessimistic and severe of the two.[44] Because Luther emphasized wholeness of the human person in his theology (rather than the body/soul dualism of the Scholastics), he argued that original sin resulted in the loss of the image of God in man and the total depravity of his nature.[45] Everything coming from this fallen nature is sinful, including all of man's moral aspirations and efforts. For Luther, in other words, original sin is not just the lack or privation of supernatural endowments, but a corruption which permeates the whole individual. Indeed, original sin is "a positive malignant power, and not a mere deprivation."[46] Moreover, the corruption of original sin is congenital, passed from generation to generation through the act of procreation, and existing within human nature even before the individual is capable of conscious expressions of free will. The sin of Adam and Eve, which all their descendants inherit, is imputed to their posterity as if it were their own sin. [47]

Whatever minor distinction had existed in Augustine between original sin

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[43] Williams, 427-8.

[44] Ibid., 428.

[45] Smith, 65.

[46] Williams, 429-30.

[47] Smith, 65-66.

and concupiscence disappeared in the theology of Luther. According to Wiley, Luther collapsed one into the other, such that original sin and concupiscence were now one and the same. The internal disharmony, disorder, and moral impotence comprehended in Augustine's conception of concupiscence was, for Luther, original sin, in the sense that it is the root sin with which all are afflicted from birth. Original sin entails an irresistible tendency toward sin; moreover, this tendency is in itself sin.[48]

For their original sin, all human beings are automatically culpable from birth, regardless of the fact that the irresistible inclination toward sin has not yet had opportunity to produce fruit in actual sin in an infant. The tendency toward sin was, for Luther, itself worthy of condemnation—a declaration in which Wiley claims Luther went further than Augustine, who did not stress the point that an inclination toward sin is itself meritorious of condemnation. Furthermore, though in Luther's view baptism could cleanse the sinner of the *guilt* for sin, original sin as an irresistible tendency toward sin would remain even after baptism. In keeping with Luther's doctrine of justification by faith, sin is no longer *imputed* after baptism, but the disordered nature still remains. Sinners are justified because God counts them righteous, not because they in fact *are* righteous.[49]

Like Augustine, Luther held that the human will was enslaved as a result of

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[48] Wiley, 89.

[49] Ibid., 88-90. This latter distinction is the basis for Luther's declaration that justified individuals are *simul justus et peccator* (simultaneously justified and sinners).

the Fall. No longer are human beings free to choose the good; instead, the human will is now bound to oppose God and to flee from him. Indeed, sin blinds human reason, such that human beings can no longer even recognize sin for what it is. As Williams puts it, both Luther and Calvin taught a "relentless and iron determinism": though unwilling in the final analysis to make God the author of sin, nevertheless both stressed, Luther in stronger terms than Calvin, the "immutable necessity" that governs all human actions since the Fall. With the will in bondage, human nature has no choice but to sin.[50]

The hallmarks of Luther's doctrine, then, were the complete depravity of man, the utter bondage of his will, and the notion of sin as inherited. It was a total return to Augustine's doctrine, and perhaps a strengthening of Augustine's doctrine, in the sense that Luther held that the inclination to sin was in itself sin, and that this inclination remains even after baptism.

Most Augustinian of the Reformers, according to Smith, was the Swiss Reformer John Calvin, who is known for portraying human nature in the darkest possible way.[51] As Partee notes, "Calvin's doctrine of sin is often regarded as so severe that 'Calvinism' can be used as a synonym for the gloomiest possible evaluation of the human condition and its most dreary prospects."[52] However, Partee also notes that the chief goal of Calvin's theology with respect to sin was not

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[50] Williams, 433-435.

[51] Smith, 89.

[52] Charles Partee, *The Theology of John Calvin* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008), 126.

to stress the gloom of the human condition but to elevate the glory of divine grace. The doctrine of sin is not his focus, but is merely a foil to the doctrines of grace and salvation. Though he describes the Fall in the harshest of terms, his motive for doing so is to avoid giving any sense of human capacity for goodness apart from God's redeeming grace.[53] Furthermore, though often understood as very pessimistic, his doctrine of total depravity and the absence of free will was in a real sense a relief to Protestants of the sixteenth century. After all, in the words of Partee, "freedom can be an intolerable burden," in the sense that the doctrine of the freedom of the will implies the necessity of some human act of the will toward God.[54] Any focus on human action in the process of salvation has the potential to either throw into question the certainty of salvation, or else prompt pride. On the other hand, Calvin's emphasis on the sovereignty of God and the total helplessness of man brought God's grace into sharp relief: It is because of *grace*, not because of any human effort or act of will, that humankind experiences salvation.

Instead of stressing humanity's freedom of will, Calvin laid stress on the corruption of human nature, reason, and will as a result of original sin. In his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Calvin defines original sin as that "hereditary depravity and corruption of our nature, diffused into all parts of the soul, which first makes us liable to God's wrath, then also brings forth in us those works which

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[53] Partee, 129.

[54] Ibid., 131.

Scripture calls 'works of the flesh' (Gal. 5:19)."[55] Two points are worth noting about this definition. First, like Luther and Augustine before him, Calvin maintained that Adam's sin brought ruin not only to himself, but also to his descendants. The chief result of Adam's Fall was death of the soul, a spiritual and moral corruption in which, by God's ordination, all the rest of humanity shared.[56] Though he did not explain how Adam's sin and the guilt for it was extended to the rest of humanity, he insisted that there is some connection between Adam's transgression and the corrupted state of the rest of the human race. Adam's fall plunged human nature into destruction, and no part of the nature of him or his descendants remained unaffected.[57] Calvin strongly denied the notion, held by Pelagius and others, that the universality of sin is due only to imitation of Adam, rather than to inherited corruption. His ground for this denial was the reasoning that if sin comes solely through imitation, then Christ's righteousness likewise would be available only through imitation, a conclusion that was unthinkable for Calvin.[58]

The second point worth noting about Calvin's definition of original sin is that he maintained that the "hereditary depravity and corruption of nature" with which all human beings are born is itself sin and deserving of condemnation. We are culpable not only for actual sins, but also for original sin—that is, for the corrupted

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[55] Calvin, quoted in Blocher, 18.

[56] Smith, 74.

[57] In fact, it was not only human nature that was corrupted; Adam's fall wrought corruption on the rest of the natural world as well (Partee, 134).

[58] Ibid., 136.

state in which we are born.[59] In this manner, both of the great Reformers accepted the notion, implicit if not explicit in Augustine's thinking, of "the intrinsic sinfulness of concupiscence."[60] Even before the corrupted nature of human beings has produced fruit in action, their inherited condition is still properly called sin.

Regarding the state of human will after the Fall, Calvin was not optimistic. Like Luther, Calvin held that the human will is enslaved. Fallen human beings retain no freedom of choice when it comes to sin, for they are, in his words, "fettered by sin," "bound in servitude to the devil," and "held under the yoke of sin."[61] Freedom not to sin is no longer an option. On the other hand, Calvin does not totally deny the freedom of the will.[62] Human sin is still voluntary, in the sense that human beings willingly choose the sinful acts they are bound to do anyway. "*We sin spontaneously,*" maintains Calvin, "*as it would be no sin, were it not voluntary*. But we are so given up to sin, that we can do willingly nothing but sin; for the corruption which bears rule within us thus drives us forward."[63] Further, though the will is bound, Calvin respected some measure of human ability in what Campbell terms "the lower realm

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[59] Zackrison, 156.

[60] Williams, 432.

[61] Calvin, quoted in Smith, 76.

[62] Partee suggests that Calvin did not completely reject the idea of free will, but avoided using the term because of the connotations and the risk of misunderstanding (Partee, 133).

[63] Calvin, quoted in Iain D. Campbell, *The Doctrine of Sin in Reformed and Neo-Orthodox Thought* (Ross-Shire, Great Britain: Mentor, 1999), 79, emphasis in Campbell.

of temporal things." Calvin acknowledges that human beings make judgments regarding civil order, frame laws for the good of society, and participate in matters relating to politics and economy. Human beings are also capable of producing art and literature, all of which are evidence for Calvin that "however much fallen and perverted from its original integrity, [humanity] is still adorned and invested with admirable gifts from its Creator."[64] Such statements would seem to mitigate his emphasis on the total corruption of human nature. Overall, however, Calvin stressed the incapacity of the will and total inability of human beings to rescue themselves from the bondage of sin. Key to his theology is an understanding of the absolute necessity of God's grace.

M. L. Andreasen

Andreasen's Heritage from Adventist Pioneers

Although influenced by Luther and Calvin in many respects, the pioneers of the Adventist denomination adopted a very different line of thinking on original sin than these Protestant predecessors. The development of the Adventist denomination's stance on original sin was heavily influenced by the ideas of the Radical Reformation and the Wesleyan theological tradition, as well as by English Enlightenment free thinkers such as John Taylor, who all emphasized the free agency of human beings and rejected the complete depravity of human nature. The early Adventists agreed that Adam's sin caused physical death for the human race,

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[64] Calvin, quoted in Campbell, 77.

but they rejected out of hand the notion of inherited guilt, as well as the idea that Adam's sin had thoroughly ruined the moral nature of his descendants.[65]

During the nineteenth century, however, there were some modifications to the earliest Adventist position on sin. During this period, Adventist writers began to focus more on the doctrines of sin, salvation, and sanctification, in contrast to their earlier emphasis primarily on the doctrine of man. By the end of the century, Adventist writers reflected an increased "willingness to make the connection between Adam's sin and the morally depraved nature." In other words, Adventist writers began to perceive that Adam's sin brought with it not just physical death, but corruption of the moral nature as well.[66] An increased soteriological emphasis after 1888 meant that Adventists tended to emphasize the helplessness of man before God and the necessity of righteousness purely by faith, rather than through any human effort. Adventist writers continued to maintain that guilt was not inherited from Adam, yet they affirmed that the propensity to sin and the condition of spiritual death and depravity was an inheritance from our first parent.[67] In other

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[65] Zackrison, 219-278. For the influence of Wesleyanism on the Adventist understanding of sin, salvation, and perfection, see Woodrow W. Whidden, "Adventist Theology: The Wesleyan Connection," Biblical Research Institute, 18 April 2005, http://www.adventistbiblicalresearch.org/documents/wesleyanconnectionSDA.htm (accessed December 1, 2009).

[66] Zackrison, 323-4.

[67] Ibid., 351-352. Man's spiritual nature is pictured as depraved, yet "aside from one or two unclear statements on guilt by Ellen White, there are no precise statements that SDAs included propensities as properly called sin" (Ibid., 379).

words, the spiritual nature of the human race had suffered substantial damage because of Adam's transgression.

An additional important development in nineteenth-century Adventist soteriology was an increasing stress on the importance of sanctification. Because Adventists had never held that the propensity to sin itself constitutes sin, and because they believed in the new birth experience as a spiritual rebirth, they were optimistic about the potential for overcoming sin. Indeed, "there was a general pervasive notion among SDA writers that the human sinful nature could be overcome through God's grace."[68] By the end of the century, then, Adventist doctrine included the idea that Adam's sin brought not just death, but also depravity and sinful inclinations on the rest of the human race. At the same time, however, Adventists were keen to stress the potential for overcoming these propensities, and victory over sin was an important part of the Adventist soteriological message.[69] In general, then, there is a marked optimism about early Adventist thinking on sin and its effects on human nature, particularly as compared to the thought of Augustine or the magisterial Reformers. Adventist pioneers were generally inclined to stress man's weakness rather than his incapacity to choose good, and they were hopeful about his potential to overcome sinful human tendencies.

This heritage of optimism regarding human nature was reflected, developed, and magnified in the twentieth century in the theology of M. L. Andreasen, a Danish-

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[68] Zackrison, 384.

[69] Ibid., 403.

born Adventist minister and the most important theologian of the Adventist denomination in the 1930s and 40s. After immigrating to the U.S. in 1894, Andreasen served in various positions of denominational leadership. A diligent scholar, he also authored over a dozen books and many articles in various church papers.[70] Because he is the individual to whom George Knight's most directly reacts with his doctrine of sin, I will spend some time developing Andreasen's particular understanding of sin as well as his understanding of salvation, since the two topics are directly connected.[71]

The event for which Andreasen is best known is the controversy over the book *Questions On Doctrine*, a controversy that occurred at the end of Andreasen's life, after his retirement.[72] In response to questions from Evangelical leaders in the

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[70] Wesley Hallman, "A Biography of Milian Lauritz Andreasen During the Years 1935-1950" (research paper, Center for Adventist Research, James White Library, Andrews University, Berrien Springs, MI, 1974), 1-4.

[71] Knight openly acknowledges that there is a "definite sense" in which his thought responds to M. L. Andreasen. In fact, according to Knight, the chapter in Andreasen's book *The Sanctuary Service* entitled "The Last Generation" is *the* chapter to which his thought on sin and salvation reacts. In Knight's estimation, that single chapter has done more to shape Adventist discussion than anything else written in the 20th century. That one chapter, and the doctrine of sin that undergirds it, was the dominant influence on Adventism in the 1940s and 50s, and it spawned an entire perfectionist movement within Adventism. Knight sees himself as only one of a host of other Adventist theologians, including Dennis Priebe, Desmond Ford, Morris Venden, Hans LaRondelle, and Edward Heppenstall, whose writings are all in one way or another a reaction and response to Andreasen's pivotal ideas (George R. Knight, telephone interview by author, 13 August 2009; cf. M. L. Andreasen, *The Sanctuary Service*, 2nd rev. ed. [Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1947], 318-319, 321).

[72] *Questions on Doctrine*, annotated ed. (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2003).

mid-1950s about Adventist beliefs, Adventist leaders decided to publish a book of questions and answers on Adventist doctrine in order to provide an authoritative statement of Adventist belief. After its publication in 1957, *Questions on Doctrine* enjoyed wide circulation and approval, but it also produced a bitter reaction from individuals in some quarters, who felt that the authors of the book had betrayed central doctrines of the church because of pressure from Evangelical critics. A major battle ensued, with M. L. Andreasen quickly becoming the leading and most vocal opponent of the book. The controversy bitterly divided certain sectors of the Adventist denomination, and some divisions remain to this day. [73]

[73] A historical overview of the circumstances surrounding the *Questions on Doctrine* controversy can be found in T. E. Unruh, "The Seventh-day Adventist Evangelical Conferences of 1955-1956," in M. L. Andreasen, *The M. L. Andreasen File: Manuscripts and Letters Pertaining to the Evangelical Conferences of 1955-1956 (*St. Maries, ID: LMN Publishing, 1988), pages unnumbered, as well as in Jerry Moon, "M. L. Andreasen, L. E. Froom, and the Controversy over *Questions On Doctrine*" (research paper, Center for Adventist Research, James White Library, Andrews University, Berrien Springs, MI, 1988). George Knight has also written about the controversy in his "Historical and Theological Introduction to the Annotated Edition," *Questions on Doctrine*, xiii-xxxvi. The essential facts are these: Around 1954-55, when Andreasen was 81 years of age, an independent publisher (Zondervan) sent Walter Martin, a staff writer for the fundamentalist magazine *Eternity*, to the Seventh-day Adventist denominational headquarters in Washington to find out more about Adventists in preparation for a book he was writing a book on Adventist theology. The ensuing interviews with Adventist leaders extended over hundreds of hours. In response to the detailed questions posed by Martin and his publisher, the Adventist theologians compiled a comprehensive set of answers, aiming to provide an authoritative statement on Adventist belief. The project grew to be so significant that soon Adventist leaders decided to make the document of questions and answers into a book for the benefit of the entire Adventist denomination. After the publication of the book, however, Andreasen was highly critical of what he saw as a betrayal of biblical truth in the book's presentation of the doctrines of the atonement and the nature of Christ.

Largely as a result of this controversy, Andreasen began to articulate his unique doctrine of sin and salvation.[74] He held to a comparatively mild understanding of the Fall, in that he accepted a weakened human nature after Adam's transgression, but not a thoroughly corrupted one. Because of this fact, his doctrine of sin focused primarily on actual sin rather than original sin, in that he understood sin more as a series of discrete actions than as a condition afflicting an individual from birth. In keeping with his mild doctrine of the Fall, Andreasen stressed the freedom of the human will and insisted on the possibility—even the necessity—of complete sanctification, by which he meant total victory over sin and the achievement of sinless perfection while in this life.

Though his writings imply a distinctive doctrine of sin and the Fall, Andreasen's views on these topics stem from his views of atonement and the nature of Christ, which were actually his primary concerns in his criticisms of *Questions on Doctrine*. Because his particular understanding of the nature of sin and the consequences of the Fall flows directly from his doctrines of atonement and the nature of Christ, it is necessary to summarize his views of these latter issues before elaborating further his position on sin.

Andreasen's View of Atonement and the Nature of Christ

Key to Andreasen's thought is his rejection of the traditional Protestant belief that atonement for the sins of humanity was completed in Christ's death on the

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[74] For a collection of Andreasen's writings during this controversy, see Andreasen, *The M. L. Andreasen File*.

cross. Indeed, Andreasen's most significant objection to *Questions on Doctrine* was to what he saw as the book's implication that Christ's atonement was finished at Christ's death.[75] For Andreasen, the atonement could not have been completed on the cross, because Christ is still doing an atoning work for us as high priest in heaven. This work consists of him finishing his redemption of humanity by finally eradicating sin from our lives through the process of sanctification. Thus Andreasen has a multi-phase understanding of atonement. By the conclusion of his high priestly work, according to Andreasen, Christ will have fully accomplished his work of complete sanctification in human life. Indeed, the last generation of human beings on earth will be completely cleansed of sin and will live in sinless perfection. Once the final cleansing of the last generation is complete, according to Andreasen, Christ will return to earth. [76]

For Andreasen, this final sanctification of Christ's end-time followers is not only necessary but critically important, in that the perfection of God's people vindicates God's character before his universe. This belief is based on Andreasen's concept of the great cosmic controversy between God and Satan, who Andreasen

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75 Ken Perman, "A Biographical Sketch of M. L. Andreasen (1876-1962)" (research paper, Center for Adventist Research, James White Library, Andrews University, Berrien Springs, MI, 1974), 23-25.

[76] Andreasen, *The Sanctuary Service*, 302. Much of my information regarding Andreasen's views of atonement is from Arthur J. Stagg, "The Doctrine of Atonement as Presented by M. L. Andreasen" (research paper, Center for Adventist Research, James White Library, Andrews University, Berrien Springs, MI, 1995). Andreasen's belief that Christ will return when the final cleansing of his people is complete is undergirded by a statement from Ellen White, believed by Adventists to have the gift of prophecy. According to White, "When the character of Christ shall be perfectly

believed has charged that the law of God is unreasonable and cannot be kept. In answer to this charge, God needs a generation of righteous people who prove to the universe that his law is righteous and can indeed be kept. Thus, through the final sanctification of believers, God and his government will be vindicated, while Satan and his charges will be defeated. In Andreasen's words,

> In the last generation God gives the final demonstration that men can keep the law of God and that they can live without sinning . . . . Through the last generation of saints God stands finally vindicated. Through them He defeats Satan and wins His case . . . . The cleansing of the sanctuary in heaven is dependent upon the cleansing of God's people on earth. How important, then, that God's people be holy and without blame! In them every sin must be burned out, so that they will be able to stand in the sight of a holy God and live with the devouring fire.[77]

Coupled with his position that the final generation would perfectly reflect the character of Christ is Andreasen's belief, also supported ostensibly by the writings of Ellen White, that the final generation on earth will go through the time of trouble in the last days without Christ's mediation. After all, with sinless characters, the people of this last generation would have no need of a mediator between themselves and God.[78]

The significance of Andreasen's beliefs regarding the atonement for his doctrine of sin lies in the fact that he sees complete sanctification—that is, full deliverance from sin—as possible, and indeed as a crucial part of atonement. Unlike Augustine, Luther, or Calvin, Andreasen maintained that human beings can

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reproduced in His people, then He will come to claim them as his own" (Ellen G. White, *Christ's Object Lessons* [Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 1969], 69).

[77] Andreasen, *The Sanctuary Service*, 318-319, 321.

[78] Ibid., 318.

overcome sin in the flesh and be molded into the perfect image of Christ even while on this earth. Thus his doctrine of atonement directly determined his doctrine of sin.

One of the major reasons Andreasen could believe in a final generation perfectly reflecting the character of Christ was because of his belief that human beings have the same nature as Christ and are thus capable of overcoming sin in the same ways he did. According to Andreasen, who was following such nineteenth-century Adventist theologians as A. T. Jones, E. J. Waggoner, and W. W. Prescott, Christ's human nature during his existence on earth was the same as the nature of Adam after the Fall. In other words, though Christ did not have any guilt for sin, he had all the same disabilities and sinful tendencies from which the rest of the human race suffers. Because of this, Christ can be our example of how to live a perfect life.[79] If Christ perfectly overcame sin, and his nature was the same as human nature presently, then obviously it is possible, even imperative, for *all* human beings to overcome sin and live in sinless perfection.

In sum, then, the key aspects of Andreasen's theology bearing on the doctrine of sin are his multi-phase understanding of atonement, with the final phase centering on Christ's full and final cleansing of his people from sin. His belief that Christ had the same nature as fallen humanity meant that Christ functions as an example of the victory humanity can experience over sin: We can overcome sin just as Christ did. On these grounds, Andreasen concluded that sinlessness is possible and emphasized the necessity of perfect sanctification on this earth. The final

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[79] Stagg, 18-20.

generation before Christ's advent will have been cleansed so fully and have overcome sin so completely that they will be able to stand before God without mediation.

Andreasen's Understanding of the Nature of Sin and the Sinful Human Nature

Andreasen's doctrine of salvation and sanctification obviously entails a particular understanding of sin and the sinful human nature. Whereas Augustine and the Reformers had stressed man's depravity of nature from birth, Andreasen's stress on the possibility of perfection led him to deemphasize inherited corruption. Instead, Andreasen concentrated more on *actual* sin than on sin as a condition of depravity. The definition of sin that perhaps best captures Andreasen's understanding of it is the one provided in 1 John 3:4, that sin is the transgression of the law. Indeed, Andreasen always treats sin in the context of the law of God. The original sin in heaven, as Andreasen understands it, was one of transgression of God's laws, and the first human sin was also a breaking of God's commands. Now that God's law has been encapsulated in the Ten Commandments, sin is equal to the breaking of one of the injunctions of the Decalogue.[80]

Obviously, the idea of sin as transgression of the law implies that sin is an action. However, Andreasen's understanding of sin also includes a recognition that sin is an attitude, a state of mind. After all, he maintains that the law deals with outward behavior, but has a spiritual aspect as well. He identifies the root of all sin

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[80] Darius Jankiewicz, "The Doctrine of Sin within Its Soteriological Context in the Writings of M. L. Andreasen" (research paper, Center for Adventist Research, James White Library, Andrews University, Berrien Springs, MI, 1996), 1-6.

as covetousness, which means that the problem of sin runs deeper than just behavior; it is rooted in the mind.[81] "Sin begins in thought," he states. "It ends in act. If the beginning can be controlled, the end will take care of itself. *It is the mind, the heart, that needs purifying*. When these are clean, all is well. Contrariwise, however correct the outward behavior may be, if the heart is corrupt, all is evil.[82]"

Despite his clarity on the nature of sin, one of the major ambiguities of Andreasen's thought is that he never addresses *why* people sin. According to Darius Jankiewicz, it is not clear whether he believes people transgress the law due to inherited depravity or by their own free choice. Andreasen does not address the question of whether human beings are *born* sinful, or if they become sinful only when they commit their first sinful *act*. Nor is he specific about the way in which sin is passed on from generation to generation: Is it only the consequences and results of sin that are passed on, or does Adam's posterity actually inherit a sinful nature? In general, then, Andreasen is vague about the effect of Adam's sin on his posterity.[83]

At any rate, however, just as the law is central to Andreasen's doctrine of sin, it is likewise crucial to his interrelated doctrine of salvation. In Andreasen's soteriology, justification is an important stage of salvation, for that is the stage in which God forgives the sinner and accepts him or her as righteous. However, mere justification is not enough, for the justified person is not yet *truly* righteous.

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[81] Jankiewicz, 9.

[82] M. L. Andreasen, quoted in Jankiewicz, 21.

[83] Jankiewicz, 11-12.

Sanctification and true deliverance from sin is also necessary. In Andreasen's own words, "The plan of salvation must of necessity include not only forgiveness of sin but complete restoration. Salvation *from* sin is more than forgiveness *of* sin."[84] For this reason, Andreasen strongly emphasizes the importance of obedience. The most significant aspect of salvation, for him, is the fact that, through grace, converted people are again able to keep God's law. This ability to keep the law is not given miraculously, but developed slowly but surely through man's submission to God:

> Character is not created. It is *made*, it is *developed*, it is *built*, by a series of tests graduated to the strength of the man tested. God at first gives a light test. Man easily passes it. Then comes the next test, a little stronger, and man passes that. Thus little by little resistance to temptation develops, until certain temptations no longer become a battle. As an example, a man makes a serious effort to overcome the tobacco habit. At first it is hard to resist the temptation, but gradually the man grows stronger, and after a while tobacco is a temptation no longer. He has gained the victory.
>
> So it may be with every other weakness.[85]

As is obvious from a cursory comparison of Andreasen's thought to the theology of centuries of Christian thinkers before him, Andreasen's definition of sin is relatively narrow and his teaching on the effects of the fall on human nature relatively mild. Though he does perceive that human beings suffer from inherited weaknesses, Andreasen does not seem to recognize any idea of a sinful human nature, per se, and of course his understanding of sin requires that man not be

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[84] Andreasen, *The Sanctuary Service*, 300.

[85] Andreasen, "The Atonement IX," March 13, 1958, in M. L. Andreasen, *The M. L. Andreasen File*, 86.

inherently corrupted and depraved.[86] Rather, Andreasen's view is that it is entirely possible for man to overcome sin by imitating Christ's model. "Christ showed the way. He took a human body, and in that body demonstrated the power of God. Men are to follow His example and prove that what God did in Christ, He can do in every human being who submits to Him."[87] Since Andreasen believes man's nature is such that he can form a perfect character like Christ's, it is necessary for Andreasen to presuppose an understanding of the nature of sin that allows for its complete eradication from human life. Accordingly, Jankiewicz identifies the central question with respect to Andreasen's writing on sin:

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[86] It is true that Andreasen does make room in his theology for inherited weaknesses and disabilities, and he obviously has some concept that human nature inherited from Adam is a flawed nature.

For example, Andreasen acknowledges that "sin, like some diseases, leaves man in a deplorable condition—weak, despondent, disheartened. He has little control of his mind, his will fails him, and with the best of intentions he is unable to do what he knows to be right" (*Sanctuary Service*, 300). A few pages later, he speaks of those in the last generation on earth as "bearing the sins of their forefathers" and suffering from "inherited tendencies" (312).

Jankiewicz also quotes Andreasen at one point as saying that "strict justice demands that the one who breaks the rules of life shall perish. But fairness also demands that one who is born in sin, for which he is in no way responsible, *shall have his disabilities removed*, be placed on vantage ground, and be given the same chance which the first man had. This is not a matter of mercy but of justice. . . . Whereas it is merciful of God to forgive us our trespasses, it is also true that there is justice in God's removing the sins for which we are not responsible—*inherited weaknesses and sins*—and not imputing them to us." As Jankiewicz notes, however, Andreasen's meaning when he refers to "disabilities" is not entirely clear. Does he mean only that the results of Adam's sin were passed on, or does Adam's posterity inherit from him an inborn sinful nature? "Furthermore, it is unclear what Andreasen means by restoring the sinner to the estate which Adam had before his fall." Is this restoration only forensic in nature, or is it actual? Andreasen's theology remains vague on this point (Jankiewicz, 23).

[87] Andreasen, *The Sanctuary Service*, 299.

> It has been shown that Andreasen's understanding of sin is closely related to the law of God, thus he singularly defines sin as 'the transgression of the law.' He does not elaborate on any other definition of sin in his writings. The question must be raised, however, whether this is the only possible definition of sin? If yes, then Andreasen's insights into the nature of sin, its effect upon humanity, and its eventual eradication from the sinner's life may be correct indeed. On the other hand, however, if Andreasen accepted a broader definition of sin, i.e., one that would embrace the inborn sinful nature of human beings, sins of omission, etc., his idea of total elimination of sin in human life would be strongly jeopardized.[88]

As will be shown in the next chapter, this question regarding the legitimacy of Andreasen's narrow definition of sin has largely defined Knight's reaction to Andreasen.

Summary

Since the early church period, Christians have struggled significantly with understanding and defining precisely how Adam's transgression affects the rest of the human race. Early in the Christian church, theologians began to develop a concept of Adam's original sin as having a fundamental and hereditary impact on human nature. Augustine, systematizing the nascent ideas of theologians before him, took a rather pessimistic stance, arguing that Adam's descendants inherit from him a thoroughly corrupted and sinful nature, and even inherit Adam's guilt itself. Augustine's dark doctrine of the total depravity of man and the heritability of Adam's sin and guilt had a tremendous impact, influencing the theologians of the Middle Ages and defining the theology of sin and human nature for most of the Reformers of the sixteenth-century Protestant Reformation.

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[88] Jankiewicz, 29-30.

Despite Augustine's significant influence, however, certain sectors of Christianity have always rejected the idea that man inherits from Adam a completely depraved nature, and they have also rejected the notion that generations since Adam can bear Adam's guilt without having personally participated in his sin. Among those who opposed or amended Augustine's extreme doctrine were Pelagius and the Radical Reformers of the sixteenth century. These theologians were much more likely to espouse the optimistic view that man continues to retain free will even after the Fall, and that he can choose for evil or for good, without being automatically compelled to do either. The Adventist church, having been influenced by the Radical Enlightenment and Wesleyanism, and having arisen in a milieu favorable to the ideas of English Enlightenment freethinkers who espoused the freedom of the will, has been inclined to support this latter view. M. L. Andreasen, a significant influence in Adventism since the mid-nineteenth century, was one of those with a relatively mild understanding of the effects of the Fall and a rather optimistic view of human nature. Though recognizing some effects of Adam's sin on subsequent generations, Andreasen fully believed in human ability (and responsibility) to overcome sin by the power and through the imitation of Christ.

CHAPTER III

GEORGE R. KNIGHT'S DOCTRINE OF SIN

Having established some context for George Knight's view of sin by surveying historical perspectives on the topic, this chapter will focus on describing the particulars of Knight's doctrine. Knight's views fall somewhere in between the views of the theologians discussed up to this point. Like Pelagius, early Adventist theologians, and M. L. Andreasen, Knight has a strong belief in human free will, and he rejects any notion that humanity has inherited guilt for Adam's Edenic rebellion. Like theologians of the Augustinian tradition, however, Knight believes in the inherited depravity of human nature, and he holds that sin has so corrupted the human nature and will as to prevent the possibility of us overcoming our sinful state through our own efforts.

Thus, given that historical Christian thought with respect to sin is roughly divided between two contrasting streams of thought regarding sin (the "mild" and "severe" understandings), the argument of this chapter will be that Knight charts a middle course between these two general positions. While embracing some aspects of the views of Augustine and the Reformers, Knight also rejects some key aspects of their doctrines. Likewise, while he shares much in common with such theologians as Pelagius and M. L. Andreasen, he is also critical of many of their tenets. In the end,

his view is less pessimistic than that of the Augustinian theologians, but less optimistic than Pelagius, Andreasen, and others like them.

The following pages will first examine factors from Knight's personal life that have affected his doctrine of sin. Next, the chapter will discuss Knight's critique of Andreasen's doctrine of sin, before moving into an analysis of Knight's own doctrine of sin. The chapter will conclude with a summary evaluation of Knight's views on sin in comparison to the perspectives of the theologians examined in the last chapter.

Biographical Factors Affecting Knight's Doctrine of Sin

Several biographical details shed important light on Knight's perspective regarding the doctrine of sin. Two in particular deserve elaboration: the first is Knight's conversion story and his initial experience as a Christian, a narrative related in *I Used to Be Perfect*. The second is Knight's position as a professor of church history and author on Adventist heritage.

An agnostic throughout his teenage years, Knight became a Seventh-day Adventist at the age of nineteen. Shortly thereafter, he was introduced to Ellen White's remark in *Christ's Object Lessons* that "Christ is waiting with longing desire for the manifestation of Himself in His church. When the character of Christ shall be *perfectly reproduced* in His people, then He will come to claim them as His own."[1] Latching on to the notion of perfection of character, Knight observed the imperfections plaguing his fellow Christians and concluded that their lack of

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[1] Ellen G. White, *Christ's Object Lessons,* 69, emphasis supplied by Knight, quoted in George R. Knight, *I Used to Be Perfect: A Study of Sin and Salvation*, 2nd ed. (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2001), 88.

perfection was a consequence of too little effort. He resolved thereupon to become, in his words, "the first perfect Christian since Christ." His efforts soon resulted in rigorous standards for himself in areas such as diet, lifestyle, and entertainment. His self-imposed dietary restrictions reduced him from 165 pounds to a mere 123 pounds in the space of three months.[2]

According to Knight's account, however, he was soon confronted with the "paradox of perfection," which he describes as follows:

> The more I thought about my perfection, the more self-centered I became. Not only did I become more self-centered, but the more I strove and the more I tried, the more judgmental I became toward those who had not achieved my 'high level.' Not only was I judgmental, but the more 'perfect' I became, the harsher I was with others who had not equaled my 'superior status' and the more negative I became about the church and others who were not as 'pure' or 'dedicated' as I.
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> In short, the harder I tried, the worse I got. . . . *In my route to perfectly reproducing the character of Christ, I had more closely mirrored the character of the devil*.[3]

Within a few years, Knight, who had become an Adventist minister after his conversion, turned in his ministerial credentials in frustration and left both Adventism and Christianity. For six years, he neither read the Bible nor prayed. It was not until 1975 that Knight reencountered Christ, his "Adventism got baptized into Christianity," and he returned to denominational service.[4]

Thus one important factor affecting Knight's perspective on the doctrines of both sin and salvation is his own failed attempt at perfection. Through his

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[2] Knight, *I Used to Be Perfect*, 90-91.

[3] Ibid., italics original.

[4] Ibid., 92.

experiences with legalistic attempts at sanctification, Knight became powerfully aware of his own human weakness, his inability to overcome sin, and the unrighteous effects of his efforts at perfection. In this sense, Knight's experience mirrors that of Augustine and Luther, both of whom invested considerable effort in achieving sanctification, only to be convicted of their own helplessness in the face of sin's power. As with Augustine and Luther, Knight's experience would fundamentally affect his understanding of the definition of sin, the magnitude of the sin problem, and the capacity of unaided human beings to conquer their own sinfulness.

The second biographical factor with significant ramifications for Knight's doctrine of sin is his deep knowledge of Adventist history. Having held the position of professor of church history at the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary at Andrews University, and having written a variety of books on the subject of Adventist heritage, Knight is well-versed in the theological movements, developments, and controversies that have shaped Adventist theology since the inception of the denomination. In particular, he is highly conversant on issues in Adventist history related to sanctification and righteousness by faith, and he is intimately familiar with the controversy over righteousness by faith that plagued the Adventist denomination at the time of the 1888 General Conference in Minneapolis. Many of Knight's published writings have covered this latter subject.[5]

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[5] See, e.g., George R. Knight, *Angry Saints: Tensions and Possibilities in the Adventist Struggle Over Righteousness by Faith* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 1989); idem, *From 1888 to Apostasy: The Case of A.T. Jones* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1987); "What Is Christian in Adventism? (1886-1919)," in

His familiarity with this era of Adventist history makes him particularly sensitive to the centrality of faith in biblical theology and the error of a misguided focus on the necessity of righteous works. Thus, while he fully espouses the importance of righteous living, Knight is acutely sensitive to any doctrine of sin and salvation that would place excessive emphasis on human obedience and human capacity to overcome sin, or that would imply that salvation is dependent on righteous behavior.

Because of his role as a church historian, Knight is also deeply familiar with the theology of M. L. Andreasen and its impact on the Adventist denomination. Knight has written in multiple places on Andreasen's role in the church, particularly with respect to the controversy over the book *Questions On Doctrine*, [6] and it is evident from Knight's references to Andreasen that his writings on the topics of sin and salvation are largely a response to Andreasen. The particulars of Knight's reaction to and critique of Andreasen's doctrine of sin are the subject of the next section.

George R. Knight, *A Search for Identity: The Development of Seventh-day Adventist Beliefs*, Adventist Heritage Series (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2000), 90-127.

[6] See, e.g., Knight, *A Search for Identity*, 144-152, and idem, "Historical and Theological Introduction to the Annotated Edition," in *Questions on Doctrine*, xiii-xxxvi. Andreasen is also referenced repeatedly in George R. Knight, *Sin and Salvation: God's Work for Us and in Us*, Library of Adventist Theology Series (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2008), as well as in the earlier edition of that book, published as *The Pharisee's Guide to Perfect Holiness: A Study of Sin and Salvation* (Boise: Pacific Press, 1992).

Knight's Critique of Andreasen's Doctrine of Sin

As explained in the last chapter, Andreasen's theology was significant because it posited a multi-phase understanding of atonement, with the final phase centering on Christ's final cleansing of his people from sin. Based on the belief that Christ had the same nature as fallen humanity and thus functions as the example of the victory we can experience, Andreasen stressed the importance of sanctification and maintained that sinless perfection is possible—indeed necessary—on this earth. The people of earth's last generation, he believed, would experience full and final cleansing from sin and would live sinless lives, standing before God without a mediator and vindicating God's character through their demonstration that his law can indeed be kept.

In his critique of Andreasen, Knight acknowledges certain strengths of the former's theology—namely, that he appreciates the importance of sanctification, recognizes that God's justification before the rest of the universe is more important than the justification of human individuals, and acknowledges that Satan accuses God of creating a law that man cannot keep.[7] However, Knight also identifies a number of weaknesses in Andreasen's theology. Most relevant for purposes of the present study are Knight's charges, detailed below, that Andreasen has an inadequate doctrine of sin, that his doctrine of salvation places too much emphasis

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[7] Knight, *A Search for Identity*, 149.

on human merit, and that he makes God dependent on humans for his own vindication and his conquest over the forces of evil.[8]

With respect to the first of these objections, Knight suggests that Andreasen fails to recognize any fundamental change in the moral nature of the human race after the Edenic Fall. Several times, Knight links Andreasen with the Pharisees of Jesus' day, who "saw neither Adam or his descendants as morally different because of the Genesis Fall. In other words, human beings since the Fall have had the same ability to live the righteous life as Adam did before it."[9] Neither the Pharisees nor Andreasen, in other words, had recognized a modification in the constitution of humanity as a result of Adam's sin, nor did they have any idea that the human will had been enfeebled. In their view, human beings retained the capacity not to sin. Though the race as a whole has universally fallen into sin, still man is ultimately free to sin or not sin, and has the same ability to be righteous as did our first parents. Thus one of Knight's perceived weaknesses in Andreasen's theology is that he fails to adequately account for the effects of the Fall on human nature.

In particular, Knight charges that the inadequacy of Andreasen's doctrine of sin lies in the fact that he, like the Pharisees, focuses too much on behavior, viewing sin primarily "as a series of actions" and failing to grasp the real depth of the sin problem, which lies in the mind and in human nature.[10] According to Knight,

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[8] Knight, *A Search for Identity*, 149-152.

[9] Knight, *Sin and Salvation*, 16.

[10] Knight, *A Search for Identity*, 150.

Andreasen took "exactly the same position as the Pharisees on sin and righteousness," whose "greatest mistake" was their misunderstanding of the nature of sin as atomized acts.[11] In such an atomized view, sin is reduced to a finite and quantifiable list of outward behaviors, rather than being understood as a fundamentally flawed orientation of the human heart. As Knight puts it, "The essence of the Pharisaic problem was viewing the nature of sin as being a series of acts rather than being primarily a condition of the heart and a rebellious attitude toward God."[12] Their behavior-focused approach to sin led them to the belief that "sin . . . could be rooted out by trying harder and doing more."[13] However, this Pharisaical view is insufficient, according to Knight's understanding, for though it is true that sin results in wrong behaviors, the biblical view is that sinful *behaviors* stem from a far more fundamental problem, a problem within human *nature*.

One of the major problems with an inadequate doctrine of sin, according to Knight, is that it significantly affects the doctrine of salvation as well. Errors in one will produce errors in the other. Knight quotes psychiatrist O. Hobart Mowrer to good effect: "*Just so long as we deny the reality of sin, we cut ourselves off, it seems, from the possibility of radical redemption [recovery].*"[14] If we have a dwarfed view of the power and extent of the reign of sin, then our concept of the salvation will

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[11] Knight, *Sin and Salvation*, 19-20.

[12] Ibid., 21.

[13] Ibid., 20.

[14] O. Hobart Mowrer, quoted in ibid., 28.

likewise be minimized. Accordingly, Knight argues that an accurate understanding of the extent and depth of the sin problem is imperative, for "an inadequate doctrine of sin will of necessity result in an inadequate doctrine of salvation."[15]

Knight's particular criticism is that the "behavior-by-behavior"[16] approach to sin shared by both the Pharisees and Andreasen leads to an insufficient understanding of sanctification. When sin is reduced to a finite list of behaviors, sanctification is likewise reduced to a "point-by-point overcoming of behavioral and attitudinal sins."[17] In other words, the atomization of sin leads to the atomization of righteousness. The logical conclusion of such thinking is that righteousness is achieved by certain outward actions. The focus in sanctification (and thus salvation) becomes external rather than internal.[18] Knight's understanding of the implications

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[15] Knight, *Sin and Salvation*, 29.

[16] Knight, *A Search for Identity*, 147.

[17] Ibid., 147.

[18] To be fair, Andreasen acknowledges that the problem of sin runs far deeper than mere behavior. For him, sin is not only a matter of actions, but also a matter of the thoughts and intents of the heart. For instance, Andreasen states: "A man might speak evil words. That he ought not to do, but the mere elimination of evil words was not satisfactory to Christ. Back of evil words was an evil heart. In that Jesus was interested. He knew that a corrupt tree could not bring forth good fruit. . . . To Jesus, the inward state of the heart was more important than outward conformity" (M. L. Andreasen, *The Faith of Jesus* [Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1939], 98-99). As Larry Kirkpatrick notes, Andreasen's concern with the heart is evident from the fact that he devotes two chapters in *The Faith of Jesus* to the inward sins of envy, discontent, pride, selfishness, covetousness, hatred, and lying. Even in *The Sanctuary Service*, where Andreasen most fully develops the idea of the sinless perfection of the final generation, he makes plain that the perfection God desires is not just a matter of outward behavior: "In God's law is exceedingly broad; it takes cognizance of the thoughts and intents of the heart. It judges motives as well as acts, thoughts as well as words" (Andreasen, quoted in Larry Kirkpatrick,

"A Response to 'The Crucial Role of M. L. Andreasen and His Last Generation Theology,' from George R. Knight's book, *A Search for Identity*, pp. 144-152," *GreatControversy.org*, 20 October 2007, http://www.greatcontroversy.org/gco/rar/kir-knight-mlalgt.php [accessed July 2009]).

For these reasons, Andreasen's perspective is slightly more complex than Knight implies. It would not be accurate to suggest, as Knight sometimes appears to do, that Andreasen sees sin only as a matter of behavior.

Furthermore, not only does Andreasen recognize that sin is a matter of motives, thoughts, and attitudes in addition to mere behavior, but he also understands that sin includes weaknesses and disabilities that are inherent in human nature and exist apart from an individual's choice. At the very least, these disabilities *affect* the freedom of the human will, even if not completely *obliterating* it. For example, in *The Sanctuary Service*, Andreasen writes, "Sin, like some diseases, leaves man in a deplorable condition—weak, despondent, disheartened. He has little control of his mind, his will fails him, and with the best of intentions he is unable to do what he knows to be right" (300). Elsewhere he speaks of the last generation on earth as the "weakest of the weak, those bearing the sins of their forefathers" (Andreasen, *The Sanctuary Service*, 302; cf. "The Atonement IX," in *The M. L. Andreasen File*, 87). These acknowledgements show that Andreasen has some concept of inborn weaknesses, and that even with good intentions, human beings are not capable of necessarily choosing right.

Such facts have led some to argue that Andreasen's doctrine of sin does not suffer from such inadequacies as Knight supposes. According to Kirkpatrick, "The charge that Andreasen taught an inadequate doctrine of sin is nothing new. . . . Yet the facts are different" (Kirkpatrick, "A Response to 'The Crucial Role of M. L. Andreasen and His Last Generation Theology'"). In answer to Knight's charge that Andreasen focuses on sin only as a series of actions, Kirkpatrick questions whether Knight has actually read Andreasen's statements on the subject: "It is true that Andreasen . . . discussed sin in terms of concrete acts. Both aspects are important. Not only the outward act but the inward disposition—ultimately—is chosen, in the sense that we intentionally reinforce an evil disposition or a righteous one." Kirkpatrick concludes that "Andreasen's doctrine differs in no way from the conventional Seventh-day Adventist doctrine of sin offered from the beginning of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in 1861, to the present" (ibid.).

On the other hand, while it is true that Andreasen acknowledges inborn weaknesses in human nature, it remains the case that he has a strong emphasis on the human capacity to overcome sin by will. For instance, though he speaks of the last generation as being "weak" and suffering "from inherited tendencies," yet in the same breath he speaks of even this last generation as capable of overcoming sin: "If any have an excuse because of weakness of any kind, they have. If, therefore, these can keep the commandments, there is no excuse for anyone in any other generation not doing so also" (Andreasen, *The Sanctuary Service*, 312). There is thus a constant emphasis in Andreasen's writings on the fact that *despite* the weaknesses and disabilities brought on by the fall, human beings still have the capacity to overcome.

of the doctrine of sin explains why he devotes considerable time to developing his doctrine of sin before moving on to the corollary doctrines of salvation, sanctification, and perfection.

In addition to his critique of Andreasen's definition of sin, Knight also criticizes Andreasen for having an excessively human-centered understanding of the plan of salvation. In Andreasen's theology, according to Knight, "humans must get to the place where they don't need Christ, where they can stand without a mediator on the basis of their *own* achievements."[19] Thus the focus in salvation is shifted, according to Knight, from Christ's work to human efforts. Though implicitly based on certain statements of Ellen White, this supposition that human beings must be able to stand before God without an intercessor is regarded by Knight as ultimately

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Indeed, Andreasen's view is that sin can be overcome by degrees, by a training of the mind. He says at one point, "Character is not created. It is *made*, it is *developed*, it is *built*, by a series of tests graduated to the strength of the man tested. God at first gives a light test. Man easily passes it. Then comes the next test, a little stronger, and man passes that. Thus little by little resistance to temptation develops, until certain temptations no longer become a battle. As an example, a man makes a serious effort to overcome the tobacco habit. At first it is hard to resist the temptation, but gradually the man grows stronger, and after a while tobacco is a temptation no longer. He has gained the victory. So it may be with every other weakness" (Andreasen, "The Atonement IX," in *The M. L. Andreasen File*, 86, italics original).

Such statements suggest that man ultimately *does* have power to choose the good and to resist sin. The inborn weaknesses and disabilities of human nature are not so strong as to prevent victory over sin. Little by little, with persistent effort, human beings can conquer their tendencies and propensities to evil thoughts, desires, and attitudes.

Thus, while it must be acknowledged that Andreasen does not see sin as *mere* behavior, statements such as the above lend credence to Knight's charge that Andreasen atomizes sin and focuses to a significant degree on particular sins (i.e., behavioral manifestations of sin), rather than sin as an orientation of the human heart.

[19] Knight, *A Search for Identity*, 151.

incongruent with the Bible and with White's views, both of which Knight claims depict salvation as a gift of God's grace received by faith, not something achieved through human efforts to reach perfection.[20]

Unfortunately, Andreasen's human-centered understanding of salvation leads to what Knight labels the most serious weakness of Andreasen's final-generation theology, which is the fact that it "makes God dependent upon human beings . . . for His justification and final triumph."[21] After all, Andreasen supposes that the spotless lives of Christ's followers are necessary for God's vindication and ultimate victory over Satan. Such a theology puts a tremendous amount of emphasis on the necessity of perfection in the lives of believers. Knight, in contrast, argues that this undermines the sufficiency of Christ's work and obscures the biblical truth that the human part in atonement is strictly to *receive* Christ's work on their behalf, not to *add* any accomplishment to it.

In sum, then, the essential nature of Knight's reaction to and criticism of Andreasen's theology is this: Andreasen presents sin as a matter of behavior and

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[20] The most explicit of White's statements regarding standing before God without a mediator runs as follows: "Those who are living upon the earth when the intercession of Christ shall cease in the sanctuary above are to stand in the sight of a holy God *without a mediator. Their robes must be spotless, their characters must be purified from sin by the blood of sprinkling.* Through the grace of God and their own diligent effort they must be conquerors in the battle with evil" (Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy Between Christ and Satan* [Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1980], 425, quoted in Knight, *Sin and Salvation*, 179, italics supplied by Knight. Cf. White, *Great Controversy*, 614, 623, 649; Ellen G. White, *Early Writings* [Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1945], 48. For Knight's response to Andreasen's interpretation of these statements by White, see Knight, *Sin and Salvation*, 179-183).

[21] Knight, *A Search for Identity*, 151-152.

thus perceives sin as a series of particular acts. In this manner, he "atomizes" sin. Furthermore, Andreasen lays a great deal of stress on the possibility and importance of human perfection. His multi-phase understanding of the atonement presents the perfecting of human beings and the elimination of sin in their lives as one of the stages of atonement, and he even goes so far as to argue that the sinlessness of the final generation on earth is necessary to vindicate God against the charges of Satan and finally win the battle over evil. Thus Andreasen has a highly optimistic view of human nature and its capacity to overcome sin. Knight, in turn, sees Andreasen's views as repeating the error of the Pharisees of Jesus' day, who, in Knight's estimation, were guilty of severely misunderstanding the nature and depth of sin.

Knight's Doctrine of Sin

Having examined Knight's perception of the flaws in Andreasen's "Pharisaical" doctrine of sin, we now turn to Knight's own perspective on the nature and extent of sin.

For Knight, the issue of sin, which he understands as "separation from the life and character of God," is "the core of the human problem."[22] In his view, it is with respect to the doctrine of sin that we find one of the key distinctions between Christianity and other religions. Indeed, although other world religions do not entirely ignore the issue of sin, there is a "radical discontinuity" between

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[22] George R. Knight, *Philosophy and Education*, 4th ed. (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2006), 210.

Christianity and other faiths when it comes to the understanding of sin, in the sense that other religions view the present state of the world and humanity as normal, while Christianity views it as highly abnormal. Far from representing normalcy, "the Bible teaches that human beings have fallen from their normal relationship with God, other people, their own selves, and the world around them."[23] This, then, is Knight's starting assumption with respect to the doctrine of sin: Our present condition is not normal.

As with the analysis of the views of Augustine, Pelagius, the Reformers, and M. L. Andreasen in the last chapter, this chapter will proceed by describing Knight's views with respect to three fundamental issues: the nature of sin, the results of the Fall, and the nature of the inheritance of sin from Adam.

The Nature of Sin

With respect to what sin *is*, two points are noteworthy. First, sin, for Knight, is primarily a relational concept: Sin represents rebellion against God. Second, individual acts of sin are not the root of sin; rather, they stem from the flawed, rebellious orientation of human nature. These two premises together mean that Knight understands the nature of sin primarily in terms of an attitude, a state of relationship, and an orientation. Indeed, Knight's overarching claim regarding the nature of sin is that *SIN* (i.e., fallen human nature; the flawed orientation of the human heart) is the ultimate source of all *sins* (i.e., individual acts of sin). The specifics of Knight's definition of sin will be explored below under three headings:

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[23] Knight, *Philosophy and Education*, 184.

(1) sin as a relational concept, (2) sin as an orientation of human nature, and (3) sin as action.

Sin as a Relational Concept

In explaining his own concept of sin, Knight contrasts two basic approaches to the nature of sin. On the one hand, sin can be understood primarily as a legal matter, wherein sin is perceived as the transgression of law. On the other hand, sin can be viewed in more of an ethical or relational context, in which it is understood primarily in terms of rebellious intent.[24] Although Knight recognizes that there is a sense in which sin is transgression of God's law, and thus a legal matter, he tends to view sin primarily in ethical/relational terms. In fact, he explicitly states that "because the Bible defines sin in reference to God, *sin is a relational concept*. . . . *Sin is not a broken relationship to a code of law, but a rebellious and broken relationship to the Lord of the law*."[25] Most of the various definitions of sin that Knight offers involve relational concepts. For example, he says in one place that the essence of sin is pride, which "is integrally linked to self-centeredness, self-sufficiency, and an unhealthy self-love—a frame of mind which induces us to trust in our own goodness, strength, and wisdom, rather than to rely upon the Creator-God."[26]

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[24] Knight, *Sin and Salvation*, 47.

[25] Ibid., 41, italics original.

[26] Knight, *Philosophy and Education*, 184-5.

Elsewhere, he maintains that "sin is love focused on the wrong object,"[27] and that distrust of God lies at the root of all sin.[28]

In keeping with his primary emphasis on the ethical/relational aspect of sin, the most comprehensive definition that Knight offers is a three-fold understanding of sin as a state of rebellion, as a broken relationship, and as a series of acts.[29] Sin is rebellion, in the sense that it is a willful, personal choice against God. Though Knight grants that human beings are fallen by nature and suffer from sinful propensities apart from any willful choice, yet nevertheless the human state is one of *active* hostility toward and resistance against God's laws, government, and person.[30] This state of rebellion, and the broken relationship that stems from such rebelliousness, then results in individual acts of sin. Noteworthy here is the fact that individual acts of sin flow from the deeper problem of a failed and rebellious relationship. Thus the three aspects of sin—rebellion, severed relationship, and acts—are all interrelated, with the latter stemming from the former.

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[27] Knight, *Sin and Salvation,* 38.

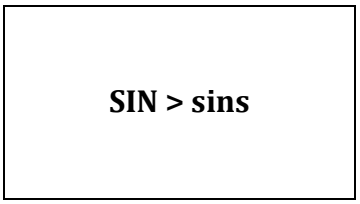
[28] George R. Knight, *The Cross of Christ: God's Work for Us*, Library of Adventist Theology Series (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2008), 19.

[29] Knight, *Sin and Salvation*, 39. Importantly, temptation is not sin, for even Jesus was tempted (ibid., 43).

[30] Knight, *The Cross of Christ*, 26.

Sin as an Orientation of Human Nature

In addition to his emphasis on the relational aspects of sin, Knight also stresses the significance of sin as an orientation of human nature. A key component of Knight's doctrine of sin is that sinful actions are not the root of sin, but are rather produced by a state of the heart. It is "the sinful heart, the heart in willful rebellion against God, [that] produces acts of sin in the daily life."[31] Knight bases this conviction on such biblical statements as that found in Matt 12:34, 35: "Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. The good man out of his good treasure brings forth good, and the evil man out of his evil treasure brings forth evil." The problem, then, is not sinful acts, per se, but rather "humanity's twisted heart."[32] Put a different way, sin "is not merely a set of discrete acts, but . . . a state of fallenness. Human beings have a sinful nature that leads them to do sinful acts."[33] We are fallen not just because of the acts we *do* or even because of the thoughts we *think*, but because of who we *are*. Knight illustrates this point with the following diagram:



[31] Knight, *Sin and Salvation*, 42.

[32] Ibid., 42; Knight also references Matt 14:18-19; 7:17-18; Mark 7:20-23; Jas 3:11.

[33] Knight, *Sin and Salvation*, 40.

Discrete acts of sin, or sins, stem from SIN, which is the attitude of the heart. In essence, then, Knight sees sin primarily as an issue of human nature, not of human actions.

As proof that the essence of sin lies deeper than mere actions, Knight invites consideration of the first sin in Gen 3. "The essential question is, 'Did Eve sin when she took the fruit or before she took it?'"[34] Knight argues that thought must precede deed; the sin must have occurred in Eve's mind and heart prior to her physical act of taking the fruit and eating it. "In essence, she first rebelled against God and His authority, and then and only then did she commit the acts of taking and eating."[35] Clearly, the act of sin was only a symptom of the state of Eve's heart; it was the result of sin, not the sin itself. Knight makes a similar point in his analysis of Paul's discussion of sin in Rom 7. Commenting on Paul's reference to the tenth commandment, which speaks against coveting, Knight observes:

> Most people, including many Pharisees in Paul's day, identify sin as a behavior.
>
> Paul, in deliberately selecting the tenth commandment [for analysis in his discussion of sin], goes behind the behavior to the lusting motivation that undergirds it. In other words, he is saying that sin is much deeper than our outward acts.[36]

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[34] George R. Knight, *Exploring the Letters of John and Jude* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2009), 99-100.

[35] Ibid., 100.

[36] George R. Knight, *Walking with Paul through the Book of Romans* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2002), 175.

Again, then, sin is first and foremost a matter of nature, not of action. As Knight sums it up, "a human being is not a series of good and evil actions, but a person with a 'bent' toward God or against him."[37]

Of course, sin does manifest itself in actions, a point Knight fully acknowledges. However, one of the problems with identifying sin too closely with discrete, measurable acts is that it soon leads to Pharisaical arguments over superficial matters on such issues as how far one can walk on the Sabbath or whether one can eat a piece of chocolate cake for dessert. These issues distract from the essence of sin, which lies in the attitude of the heart. To be sure, a quantitative approach to sin is tempting, because "it breaks sin (and thus righteousness) into manageable chunks, and one can get the feeling of progress and victory" over sin.[38] However, reducing sin to specific acts, words, or thoughts trivializes sin, because it gives short shrift to "unmeasurables" like pride, self-centeredness, or greed, which are fundamental attitudes rather than concrete acts. These unmeasurables are critical, for even if an individual refrains from a certain prideful thought or deed, pride still remains. By analogy, even if one cleans up a particular section of a stream, the deed will ultimately prove fruitless if the source of the stream is polluted.

Given Knight's emphasis on sin as a state of being, what of the fact that the Bible defines sin in 1 John 3:4 as "transgression" (Gk. *anomia*)? Does this not imply that sin is to be identified primarily with actions, rather than with human nature?

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[37] Knight, *Sin and Salvation*, 43.

[38] Ibid., 45.

Knight's response is to suggest an alternate translation. He favors the translation offered in many Bible versions, including the NIV, NASB, ESV, NKJV, and RSV, that sin is "lawlessness." In his understanding, the term used by John refers not just to a transgression of God's law, but to an intentional rejection of God's moral code. After all, when John writes about sin in the letter of 1 John and defines it as transgression or lawlessness, his concern is not those who transgress God's laws in individual instances, but rather those who live as if there were no law at all. Indeed, John uses the word "sin" in 1 John to refer to "living in a continuing state of sinfulness in harmony with the principles of 'the evil one' (1 John 2:14)." Accordingly, "to live a life of *anomia* is to behave as if the law did not exist. Such a life, of course, would lead to the regular breaking of the law, but that is not John's focus."[39] In other words, then, sin is indeed *anomia*, but the term refers less to specific acts of transgression and more to an attitude of disdain for or rejection of the law in general.[40]

Sin as Action

Individual acts of sin may be only symptoms, but they are real nonetheless, for the sinful nature invariably produces such sinful actions. According to Knight, however, not all sinful actions are deliberate, overt acts of transgression. In fact, sin can manifest itself in a variety of ways, and can sometimes come in disguised forms.

For example, Knight makes a point of noting that sinful actions encompass acts of *commission* as well as *omission*. In other words, sin is not just a matter of

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[39] Knight, *Letters of John and Jude*, 100.

[40] Ibid., 100-101.

committing certain wrong acts; it also includes the failure to perform acts that one *should* do; that is, "the failure to do the loving thing for one's neighbor."[41] This point is important, for it is possible, as Knight points out, to discontinue certain habits of sin while at the same time retaining an essentially mean character, which was the pitfall of the Pharisees. In this case, the fault is not in certain evil actions, but in the individual's selfish character and failure to practice kindness. As Knight also notes, allowing one's definition of sin to revolve too much around acts of commission is misleading, because it can lead to an inflated sense of one's own righteousness and one's capacity to eliminate sin from his or her life. After all, it is far easier to refrain by force of will from certain "bad" behaviors than it is to cultivate a genuinely loving attitude. The former can be counterfeited, but the latter cannot be counterfeited, for true love requires the transforming intervention of the Holy Spirit.[42]

Another aspect of sin is that it includes both voluntary and involuntary acts, to which Knight also refers, according to John Wesley's terminology, as sins "properly so called" and sins "improperly so called." "Proper" sins, in Wesley's usage, are those that involve a voluntary violation of known law; "improper" sins are involuntarily transgressions of a law, whether known or unknown. [43] As Knight

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[41] Knight, *Sin and Salvation*, 43.

[42] Ibid., 44.

[43] Ibid., 47; cf. John Wesley, *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection* (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1966), 54. Knight draws significantly on the theology of Wesley in developing his own doctrines of salvation and perfection, as evidenced by regular references to Wesley throughout *Sin and Salvation*. As mentioned previously, Wesleyanism has significantly influenced the Adventist

notes, both Wesley and Ellen White refer to involuntary sins as "mistakes," and understand them as proceeding from ignorance or the weakness of the body.[44] However, though entirely different in character, both types of sin fall under the category of "sin," and both necessitate atonement and redemptive action, as evidenced by the fact that the Levitical law required blood sacrifices for both conscious and unconscious sins.[45]

Yet another aspect of sin is that it can include ostensibly "good" acts in addition to the more obvious sins involving overtly "evil" acts. Says Knight, "not all sin is irreligious. Sin is just as happy to dress up in religious garb as in secular."[46] Indeed, it is acts of goodness that lead people into a false sense of self-sufficiency and pride. This fact has led Knight to agree with P. T. Forsyth's estimation that there is no sin more subtle than the sin of goodness, the sin of "the good people who do not know that they are not good."[47] Sins of goodness, often manifested in airs of moral superiority, are destructive "because a person who does an evil thing feels the need to repent, but those who commit vegetarian sins merely assume that they are

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denomination's understanding of sin and salvation (see Whidden, "Adventist Theology: The Wesleyan Connection").

[44] Knight, *Sin and Salvation*, 47; cf. Ellen G. White, "Operation of the Holy Spirit Made Manifest," *Review and Herald*, 12 May 1896, 290; idem, *Our High Calling* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1961), 177.

[45] Knight, *Sin and Salvation*, 47-48; cf. Exod 21:12-14; Lev 4:2, 13, 22, 27; Heb 9:7.

[46] George R. Knight, *Exploring Galatians and Ephesians: A Devotional Commentary*, The Exploring Series (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2005), 134.

[47] P. T. Forsyth, quoted in Knight, *Sin and Salvation*, 21.

better than other people." [48] According to Knight, Paul's discussion of the practice of circumcision provides a good illustration of the sin of goodness at work: Circumcision was intended as a covenant sign of relationship with God, but it had become distorted among the Galatian believers into a means of righteousness through works of the law, such that Paul could lump circumcision into the same category as idolatry, strife, and drunkenness as a "work of the flesh" (Gal 3:3; cf. 5:18-23). The problem of the Galatians was that they sinned "religiously" by trying to achieve for themselves the salvation and righteousness that only God could offer them. Unfortunately, this was the worst type of sin, in Paul's mind, because it denied the reality of God's grace and the efficacy of Christ's sacrifice. [49]

In sum, then, Knight's view of the nature of sin can be encapsulated as follows: Sin is primarily a relational concept. It is not the mere transgression of a law, but involves rebellion against the Lord of the law and the breach of the relationship between humanity and God. Likewise, sin is to be understood primarily as a matter of human nature and the orientation of the heart. It is from this fundamental orientation that all individual acts of sin flow. Finally, when the sinful nature issues in action, such actions can take a variety of forms, not all of them easily identifiable as concrete acts of willful transgression of law. The problem of sin thus runs far deeper than a mere transgression of law.

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[48] Knight, *Galatians and Ephesians*, 78.

[49] Ibid., 78, 134.

The Results of the Fall

If sin is primarily an issue of human nature and orientation, the question remains as to how exactly the human race came to have this sinful nature. Knight maintains that it was as a result of Adam's sin. Though the Bible never explains exactly how the consequences of sin were transmitted from Adam to his posterity, it is at least clear, according to Knight, on the fact that such a transmission does take place. Our sinfulness is somehow related to Adam's sinfulness.[50]

Regarding the precise consequences of the Edenic Fall, Knight identifies several. The first consequence was a series of relational alienations. Following their disobedience, Adam and Eve were estranged from God, whose presence became unbearable to them because of their guilt before him (Gen 3:8-10). They were also estranged from each other, as evidenced in the fact that Adam almost immediately began to blame Eve for the pair's transgression (Gen 3:12). Beyond this, the fact that neither Adam nor Eve were able to face up to their own actions and acknowledge their motives shows that each had become estranged from his or her own self, and was plagued now with a deceitful and corrupted heart (Gen 3:12-13). Finally, the human couple also experienced an alienation from the wider creation: Following the Fall, God declared that the earth, which was originally created to produce its bounty for the benefit of humanity, would now yield its fruits only with great toil (Gen 3:17-18). In total, then, sin resulted in four estrangements: human beings became

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[50] Knight, *Sin and Salvation*, 31.

estranged from God, from each other, from their own selves, and from the rest of creation.[51]

A second consequence of the Fall was enslavement of the human will. Though created with free will originally, Adam and Eve had the capacity to use it in such a manner as to obliterate their freedom and become trapped in sin.[52] This they did in Eden. Thus, whereas humanity's natural inclination was originally toward the good, we now have a bent toward evil. Accordingly, contrary to those who believe that children are born morally neutral or with natural goodness, Knight maintains that human beings are inwardly corrupted from the very beginning.[53] Furthermore, we cannot will our way out of our condition. After all, when the Bible describes human beings as "slaves" to sin (e.g., John 8:34), "slavery, by definition, implies helplessness."[54] Though it may be possible to "overcome some bad habit through heroic moral effort from time to time," it is impossible to overcome all bad habits and all sin, for no sooner do we achieve a victory on one front than we are defeated on a different front. The condition is truly one of bondage.[55]

Beyond alienation and enslavement, Knight identifies several more results of sin. One of these is moral defilement, that condition which produces a nagging sense

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[51] Knight, *The Cross of Christ*, 30-32.

[52] Knight, *Romans*, 42.

[53] Knight, *The Cross of Christ*, 33-34.

[54] Ibid., 34.

[55] Ibid., 35.

of uncleanliness and "dirtiness," resulting in a near universal drive for moral cleansing.[56] Another is death, which is the "terminal consequence of the rebellion that separated humanity from the source of life."[57] The death that resulted from Adam and Eve's rebellion was, according to Knight, primarily a spiritual death, but this death nevertheless affected their whole beings, and resulted eventually in physical death as well.[58] Yet another consequence of sin was the incurrence of the wrath of God. Divine wrath is an unpopular subject for modern theologians, but one that Knight describes as "extremely popular with God."[59] In Knight's understanding, God's wrath, which is referred to more than 580 times in the Bible, does not manifest itself in arbitrary spasms of violence, but is rather a "totally consistent and predictable" reaction of anger against sin of any type.[60] It is simply God's "holy reaction to the woe and misery resulting from rebellion against His government."[61]

A final consequence of the Fall was that it produced a shift in human nature. "Whereas God had originally created Adam and Eve in His image (Gen. 1:26, 27),

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[56] Knight, *The Cross of Christ*, 35-36.

[57] Ibid., 36.

[58] Significantly, the death of Adam and Eve was partly a natural consequence of separation from the divine source of life and partly the result of God's penal action. It was not a strictly automatic effect, but was partly the result of a legal death penalty, an active intervention on the part of God to stem the spread of sin's woe and misery (Ibid., 36).

[59] Ibid., 37.

[60] Ibid., 37.

[61] Ibid., 38-39.

their children bore their parents' fallen image (Gen. 5:3)."[62] Sin resulted in the partial obliteration of the *imago Dei*, meaning that fallen human nature, as discussed above, was morally corrupted and oriented toward evil. Although the image of God was not totally destroyed in humanity at the Fall, it was nevertheless "fractured and grossly distorted."[63] "The image was corrupted in all of its aspects."[64]

The Extent of Human Depravity

Clearly, Knight holds that a state of sinfulness exists from birth, but what is the extent of this sinful state? Are we totally depraved? Knight's answer is both yes and no. Though he employs the term "total depravity," it does not carry the same meaning for him as for Luther and Calvin. For one thing, Knight holds that human beings inherit tendencies to evil, but also tendencies to good.[65] Thus we are not without any trace of goodness. In addition, he states that despite our wholesale corruption, our "total depravity doesn't mean that we are as wicked as we could be."[66] We might be corrupted, yet we could be worse, in the sense that we are capable of more evil than we actually commit. However, with these caveats, Knight acknowledges that there is a sense in which we are thoroughly depraved. As he puts it, "You don't have to be a Hitler to be totally depraved. To the contrary," the biblical

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[62] Knight, *Sin and Salvation*, 37.

[63] Knight, *Philosophy and Education*, 206.

[64] Ibid., 205.

[65] Knight, *Sin and Salvation*, 35.

[66] Knight, *Romans*, 43.

meaning of total depravity is "that sin affects every part of our life, every part of our body and mind. It affects us totally in all of our respects."[67] Further, though we may retain some tendencies to goodness, our free will has been affected by the Fall to such an extent that we cannot consistently choose the good. Knight again quotes the words of Ellen White when he says that humanity's propensity to sin is "a force which, unaided, he cannot resist."[68] We are not born morally neutral, but are bound to sin.

For this reason, according to Knight, it is unthinkable for human beings to overcome the sin problem through their own effort. "Social engineering and genetic tinkering are not sufficient to correct the deep seated sin problem," and neither is a God-fearing home environment or sheer force of will.[69] We are wholly unable to correct our corruption or resist the pull of evil. In other words, Knight holds to a concept of total depravity, but in a limited sense of the word. Human beings retain some of the goodness with which God originally endowed us, and we have some tendencies toward the good, yet we are "totally depraved" in the sense that sin is an overwhelming power and has corrupted all parts of our beings, making it impossible to completely resist sin.

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[67] Knight, *Romans*, 43.

[68] Ellen White, quoted in Knight, *Sin and Salvation*, 35; cf. Ellen G. White, *Education* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1903), 29.

[69] Knight, *Sin and Salvation*, 35.

The Nature of the Inheritance of Sin from Adam

According to Knight, some conception of original sin is needed to make sense of human life. He observes, quoting Blaise Pascal, that although we may not be able to understand precisely how sin is transmitted, "we remain incomprehensible to ourselves" without some idea of original sin.[70] Yet as we have seen from the survey of historical Christian perspectives on sin in chapter 1, theologians disagree considerably on exactly what original sin entails. All concur that there is a heritage passed on to all of humanity as a result of Adam's sin, but there is no consensus as to precisely what this heritage is.

In his discussion of original sin, Knight suggests that there are two basic approaches to the concept: namely, original sin as an inheritance of guilt, and original sin as an inheritance of a fallen nature.[71] Those who understand original sin as an inheritance of guilt hold that an individual is guilty before God apart from whether or not they have yet committed any *actual* sins simply because they have inherited Adam's original sin and original guilt. Those who understand original sin merely as a fallen nature lack any concept that fallenness incurs guilt, per se.[72]

As for Knight's own position, he maintains, on the basis of such texts as Ezek 18:20 and Deut 24:16, that "sin is personal" and that it is a "willful choice against God"; thus it is impossible that guilt for sin be transferred from one person to

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[70] Blaise Pascal, quoted in Knight, *Sin and Salvation*, 32.

[71] Knight, *Sin and Salvation*, 32.

[72] Ibid., 32.

another.[73] He acknowledges that Ellen White sometimes appears to say that children inherit guilt from their parents, yet quotes her own explanation as to her meaning:

> It is inevitable that children should suffer from the consequences of parental wrongdoing, but they are not punished for the parents' guilt, except as they participate in their sins. It is usually the case, however, that children walk in the steps of their parents. By inheritance and example the sons become partakers of the father's sin. Wrong tendencies, perverted appetites, and debased morals, as well as physical disease and degeneracy, are transmitted as a legacy from father to son, to the third and fourth generation.[74]

Knight's position, then, is that we do not incur guilt until we actually make a free choice to sin.

If there is no determinism in sinning, why is it that all people inevitably fall into sin? Knight answers by pointing out that human nature has an inherited bent toward evil. Indeed, "while guilt and sin cannot be transmitted from one generation to the next, the inbuilt tendency or propensity to sin can."[75] In support of his argument he references White's statement that human beings have both cultivated and inherited tendencies to sin.[76] The reality of inherited tendencies means that infants need not be taught how to sin; it is in their nature to do so. Infants are thus born with a predisposition to sin even before they are able to make a willful choice

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[73] Knight, *Sin and Salvation*, 32.

[74] Ellen White, quoted in Knight, *Sin and Salvation*, 33; cf. Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1958), 306.

[75] Knight, *Sin and Salvation*, 34.

[76] Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1898), 671.

to sin. Sin is not a matter of determinism, then, but the inborn bent toward sin means that sin is a universal phenomenon.[77]

In sum, then, Knight's view on original sin and the nature of inheritance from Adam is that all human beings inherit the propensity toward sin; however, they do not inherit guilt.

Sin and the Will

As has already been shown, Knight holds that human nature has been corrupted as a result of the Fall, with part of this corruption entailing the limitation of free will and the transmission of propensities toward sin from generation to generation. However, a remaining point deserving of clarification is to what extent

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[77] The matter of the inborn tendency to sin leads directly to the issue of infant salvation. If infants inherit a sinful nature, are they born in a state of condemnation? Is salvation possible for infants who die before reaching the age of self-awareness? For Augustine and the Reformers, original sin meant that infants were born in a state of condemnation, and those who died in infancy without baptism would go to hell.

Knight says little about infants directly, and he takes no stance one way or the other on the question of whether or not children who die in infancy may be saved. However, the few points that he does make about infants reflect a view that is not as harsh as that of Augustinian theologians.

To begin with, as noted earlier, Knight denies that infants inherit guilt for sin. Though infants are born *sinful*, they are not *guilty*. In fact, according to Knight, individuals cannot incur any guilt until they reach a certain level of self-consciousness, that is, a certain moral facility. A person must, he claims, be able to make conscious choices in order to incur guilt (Knight interview). Furthermore, though it is true that infants are born with the tendency to sin, infants are also born with tendencies to good (Knight, *Sin and Salvation*, 34).

Though such points might suggest the innocence of infants, it is nevertheless clear from Knight's writings that infants need a Savior, for they are not born in a state of moral neutrality. Their natures are corrupted, and the bent toward evil in human nature is so strong that it is impossible to correct apart from the power of Christ (ibid., 33-35).

sin is willed, and to what extent it is possible to resist the inbuilt tendency toward sin.

Knight's thinking regarding the strength of human propensities toward sin and the possibility of resistance appears contradictory at first glance. He acknowledges on the one hand that human beings inherit a propensity to sin, and he quotes White's statement that the bent toward sin is "a force which, unaided, [human beings] cannot resist."[78] Throughout *Sin and Salvation*, he argues strongly that sin arises not just because of our free choice, but because of our sinful, fallen nature. Such statements would seem to imply that sin is unwilled and beyond human control, because it arises from human nature. In other places, however, he insists that sin must be the result of willful (i.e., free, uncoerced) choice. For example, he says at one juncture that sin is "a deliberate act of the will to rebel against God" and "a choice against God."[79] Knight also denies that there is any determinism in sin.[80]

Here, then, is the question to be answered: Is sin the result of free choice, or is it necessitated by fallen human nature? Is sin willed, or unwilled? Knight insists that the answer is both. In a sense, he claims, sin is an unwilled condition in which we are born. In another sense, however, that unwilled condition becomes a willful

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[78] Ellen White, quoted in Knight, *Sin and Salvation*, 35; cf. White, *Education*, 29.

[79] Knight, *Sin and Salvation*, 40.

[80] Ibid., 33.

way of life as self-awareness and moral consciousness develop. Thus, though sin may be unwilled initially, it becomes willed over time.

Regarding whether or not it is possible to resist sin, Knight provides a mixed answer.[81] On one hand, sin is irresistible, in the sense that it is universal.[82] All individuals are born in a condition of sin and have sinful tendencies from birth, completely apart from any willed choice. Lacking self-awareness, infants are not even cognizant of their condition and thus have no potential for resisting sin. It is in this sense that sin is irresistible. It is part and parcel of human nature since the Fall.

However, according to Knight, as soon as an individual achieves a certain level of self-awareness, the will becomes a crucial factor. Once individuals acquire moral consciousness and realize that they have wills, they must make a choice to remain with themselves at the center of their lives, or to place God at the center of their desires and affections. Thus, as soon as a person begins to recognize that he or she is a sinner, suffering from inherited propensities to sin, sin becomes a matter of the will. Simultaneously, it becomes possible to resist sin, in the sense that one can abandon one's inborn attitude of rebellion toward God.[83] One can say, then, that by

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[81] Knight interview.

[82] Knight consciously resists describing sin with the language of determinism. In his view, sin is "determined" only in the limited sense that the bent toward sin comes with being born, but not in the sense that it occurs against the will. As soon as an individual becomes cognizant of his sinful condition and as soon as the will becomes a factor, it is possible to resist sin. Thus sin is not determined. To describe the inescapability of the bent toward sin, Knight prefers to say that sin is "universal" rather than "determined" (Ibid.).

[83] As for how an individual becomes aware of himself as a sinner, Knight draws on the Wesleyan concept of "prevenient" grace, which is the grace God grants

virtue of being born as descendants of Adam and Eve, all human beings will be sinners in nature; however, no human being is permanently bound in a sinful orientation. Once an individual becomes aware of his or her own moral nature and sin becomes an issue of the will, it is possible for him or her to escape the condition of unwilled sinfulness.[84]

In sum, then, sin is both resistible and irresistible, both willed and unwilled. It can be termed "irresistible" in the double sense that sinful propensities are inherent in human nature, and that an individual who has not yet reached a state of self-awareness can do nothing to resist. As soon as self-consciousness becomes a reality, however, the will becomes a factor, and an individual is capable of making a choice for or against a sinful orientation of mind. Sin becomes resistible.

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prior to conversion to prepare the soul for conversion. "In prevenient grace," according to Knight, "God acts to offer salvation and to make the person able to respond, yet the decision is that of the individual. God does not force the human will into faith. At most it is persuaded into faith by the demonstrated love of God" (Knight, *Sin and Salvation*, 73). Through this special grace, God provides self-awareness and a desire to resist sin through the power through the Holy Spirit, even before conversion.

It is important to note that although Knight holds that it is possible to resist sin, he also stridently denies that it is possible to completely cease all individual acts of sin in this lifetime. As will be shown in the next chapter, he holds that it is possible to overcome the attitude and orientation of rebelliousness against God, but it will be impossible to avoid all behavioral sins, especially those arising solely due to ignorance or the weakness of the bodily constitution. Thus, when Knight declares that it is possible to resist sin, this should be understood as meaning it is possible to overcome the sinful orientation of mind and heart, enter into a faith relationship with God in Christ, and begin to establish habits of character that reflect this new faith-orientation; it should not be taken to mean that Knight believes it is possible to completely cease all individual acts of sin (Ibid., 144-153).

[84] As mentioned earlier, this process of resisting sin begins before conversion, according to Knight, as a result of prevenient grace. It is important to stress that resistance can occur only by means of tools given by God. Knight in no way suggests that human beings are capable of resisting sin under their own power.

Summary and Comparative Evaluation

Summary of Knight's Doctrine of Sin

As the preceding survey has demonstrated, Knight places strong emphasis on sin as an issue of *relationship* and as an issue of human *nature*, rather than as a matter of *action*. In his view, sin is not primarily a series of acts, but a state of being; acts of sin stem from the broken relationship between God and humankind and from the rebellious orientation of the human heart. Thus, though actions are important, they are only symptoms. Too much focus on these symptoms leads to a preoccupation with superficial sins and a failure to grasp the deeper essence of sin. Indeed, although the Bible defines sin as transgression, the better translation, according to Knight, is lawlessness, which captures a sense of lawlessness as an attitude, not just a specific behavior.

According to Knight, humanity's present state of sinfulness derives from Adam's sin. That original rebellion resulted in alienated relationships, enslavement of the will, moral defilement, physical and spiritual death, and incurrence of the wrath of God for the entire human race. The Edenic Fall also brought about a shift in human nature: Whereas man had been created in the image of God, that image became distorted and obscured (though not completely obliterated) through the sin of our first parents. As a result of Adam's sin, human beings are now born with corrupted natures. Though we have residual good tendencies within us, providing evidence that we retain traces of the image of God, our propensities to sin are stronger than our propensities to the good. Our bodies, minds, and wills have all been corrupted; with the image of God marred and defaced within us, we are wholly

unable to conquer sin unaided. Even if we attempt to overcome particular sins through concerted effort, we can never overcome the fallenness of our natures, which affects our whole person. Except for the grace of God, we are helpless.

Though human beings inherit a fallen nature from Adam as a result of his sin, one thing they do not inherit is Adam's guilt. In Knight's understanding, the original sin that all infants inherit is the *tendency* to sin, but not *guilt* for sin. Since sin itself is both personal and willful, guilt for it cannot be transferred. Adam's descendants are thus held liable for their own sins only, not for Adam and Eve's rebellion.

Regarding the subject of sin and the will, Knight maintains that sin is both willed and unwilled, both resistible and irresistible. Sin can be described as irresistible in two senses: First, in the sense that all human beings are born with sinful natures (i.e., with the propensity toward sin), apart from their own choice; second in the sense that until an individual reaches a certain level of self-awareness, sin is irresistible simply because the individual does not know his or her own condition. The development of moral consciousness, however, means that the will becomes a factor in sin; at this point, resistance becomes possible, as a result of God's gift of prevenient grace.

Comparison of Knight's Views to Earlier Theologians

Knight's views are both similar to and different from those of Augustine and the great Reformers. Like his predecessors, Knight has a relatively severe understanding of the consequences of the Fall. In his view, the Fall resulted in the complete corruption of human nature and in the fettering of the will. Sin is the inheritance with which all individuals are now born, and the inherited bent toward

evil is so strong that human beings are incapable of resisting it apart from the grace of God.

Yet though he shares similarities with his predecessors, Knight's views are considerably less harsh than those of Augustine and the sixteenth-century Protestant Reformers. Whereas theologians in the Augustinian tradition see the human will as completely enslaved to the point of being almost nonexistent, Knight has a relatively strong concept of the will. Though limited, the will is still a factor in sin, at least once an individual comes to a state of moral self-awareness. At that point, resistance to sin becomes a possibility because of the doctrine of prevenient grace. Further, though Knight accepts a nuanced doctrine of total depravity, the meaning he assigns to the term is softer than the meaning assigned by the theologians of the Reformation, in that he perceives humanity as retaining some good tendencies, in addition to their propensities toward evil. Human beings are not as depraved as they could be, in other words. Knight also differs with the Augustinian tradition in the sense that he has no concept of inherited guilt. Human beings suffer many results of Adam's sin, including relational alienation and corruption of our natures, but they are not guilty, per se, for Adam's sin.

Though Knight does not qualify as Augustinian in his thinking, he also is not completely aligned with theologians such as Pelagius and M. L. Andreasen, who take a more mild view of the Fall and its consequences. Knight's views are similar to those of these "mild" theologians in the sense that all three have a comparatively strong understanding of human free will, and all three view sin as a willful personal choice. However, though he shares the belief of Pelagius and Andreasen in free will

and the potential for resisting sin, Knight is not as optimistic as they are regarding human potential for overcoming the sinful nature. Whereas Pelagius and Andreasen understood Adam's descendants as possessing the same freedom to choose between good and evil as Adam and Eve had, Knight maintains that human nature underwent a fundamental shift at the Fall. Human beings are not born morally neutral or with complete freedom; human nature now suffers a hereditary bent toward sin.

Thus, compared to Pelagius and Andreasen (as well as other early Adventist theologians), Knight has a relatively strong doctrine of human depravity. Whereas his predecessors emphasized the human capacity to experience victory over sin, Knight is more keen to stress the fact that human nature is corrupted in all its aspects. Because of his understanding of the enslaving power of sin, Knight does not accept the notion that human beings can conquer their sinful tendencies from within themselves.[85] In fact, Knight's conviction regarding the corruption of human nature has led him to react strongly against M. L. Andreasen, whom Knight saw as advocating an inadequate and Pharisaical doctrine of sin. Whereas Andreasen wrote of humanity's potential for perfection, Knight criticizes him for focusing too much on outward behavior, and for failing to recognize humanity's fundamentally flawed nature.

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[85] Andreasen may not actually have understood human beings as conquering their sinful tendencies solely through their own power; however, his repeated emphasis on human effort in speaking of sanctification, coupled with his suggestions that human beings will stand in the final days of earth's history without a mediator, fighting their battles alone, strongly implies that human beings are to conquer sin through their own power. See, e.g., Andreasen, *The Sanctuary Service*, 310-321.

In sum, then, Knight attempts to strike a balance between various historical extremes on the doctrine of sin. He appreciates aspects of both the mild and severe streams of thought on the subject of sin, but he is also critical of aspects of both traditions. In the end, his theology is less pessimistic than the Augustinian tradition, but less optimistic than the theology of Pelagius, early Adventist theologians, and M. L. Andreasen. He is careful not to underestimate the power of sin and its effect on human nature, yet he is also careful to avoid an extreme view of sin that would deny free will altogether or would conclude that Adam's posterity inherits guilt, and not just consequences, from Adam's transgression.

CHAPTER IV

IMPLICATIONS OF KNIGHT'S DOCTRINE OF SIN FOR THE DOCTRINES OF SALVATION AND PERFECTION

If the doctrine of sin describes humanity's predicament, then the doctrine of salvation outlines the solution. Thus the two are very closely related. As suggested in chapter 3, an individual's doctrine of sin directly impacts his or her doctrine of salvation, because the doctrine of sin defines what it is from which human beings need salvation. As shown in the previous chapter, Knight's doctrine of sin is a response primarily to the views of M. L. Andreasen. Knight's chief problem with Andreasen's "Pharisaical" view of sin is that it is inadequate and leads therefore to an inadequate view of salvation. At this juncture, we will examine how Knight's alternative doctrine of sin leads him to a very different understanding than that of his predecessors, particularly Andreasen, on the subjects of salvation and perfection.

The argument of this chapter will be that Knight's moderate doctrine of sin leads to a moderate doctrine of salvation and perfection. Knight's doctrine of sin charts a middle course between the "mild" and "severe" views of sin, in that it has a dual stress: On one hand, Knight emphasizes the corruption of human nature, yet he simultaneously holds to the freedom of the will. This dual emphasis leads to a dual emphasis in his views of salvation. In his doctrines of salvation and perfection,

Knight stresses human helplessness and the utter inability of human beings to escape sin, yet he also underlines the importance of human cooperation with God in salvation, as well as the importance of perfection of character through the work of God's sanctifying grace on the human heart.

Knight's Doctrine of Salvation

As discussed in the previous chapter, Knight's understanding of the nature of sin is that it is simultaneously a rebellious orientation, a broken relationship, and a series of evil or immoral acts. Together, these three facets of sin result in multiple consequences: Sin causes a series of relational breaches, enslaves the will, results in moral pollution, brings spiritual and physical death on the sinner, and incurs the wrath of God. Sin not only brings about external consequences, but it has an effect on human nature itself, for it defaces the image of God in the sinner. In such a sinful state, human beings are unable to choose *not* to sin; though they may have residual tendencies to good, their natural bent is toward evil. Furthermore, sin's effects on human nature unfortunately do not affect only the individual directly responsible for the sin; rather, the sinful human nature, with its propensity to sin, is passed on from generation to generation.

If this is the predicament which sin brings on the human race, then the problems that must be addressed in the process of salvation are manifold. First, human beings' estranged relationships (with God, with their fellow human beings, with their own selves, and with creation) must be healed, and the rebellious bent of human nature must be corrected. In addition, the freedom of the will must be restored so that human beings are able to choose not to sin, moral pollution must be

cleansed, the penalty of death must be removed, and the wrath of God must be averted. Finally, the image of God must be restored in humanity, so that human beings are oriented toward the good rather than toward evil.

Given the multiple issues that must be addressed in salvation, Knight develops a comprehensive doctrine of salvation that encompasses all of the above aspects. For him, the cross of Christ is the focal point of the Christian understanding of the plan of salvation; thus he attempts to explain how the cross addresses and provides a solution to each of the problems identified earlier.[1]

God's Work for Us versus God's Work in Us

Though there are multiple aspects of salvation and many biblical word pictures to describe it, all these aspects can be divided into two general categories: those that deal with objective aspects of salvation (God's work *for* us), and those that deal with subjective aspects of salvation (God's work *in* us).[2]

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[1] Knight, *The Cross of Christ*, 71.

[2] Knight, *Sin and Salvation*, 80. This two-fold nature of Christ's salvific work is important enough in Knight's thinking to be reflected in the subtitle of *Sin and Salvation: God's Work for Us and in Us*.

Generally speaking, Knight gives about equal weight in his published writings to the subjective and objective aspects of salvation, but he emphasizes each aspect in different places. For example, while both of his major works on salvation discuss both aspects, *The Cross of Christ* gives more weight to the objective nature of salvation, while *Sin and Salvation* focuses more on its subjective nature. Often, however, the two aspects run together, and Knight speaks of both without distinguishing between Christ's work for us versus his work in us.

According to Knight, the central truth about the cross is that it is a substitutionary sacrifice.[3] This substitutionary death of Christ is the objective basis of human salvation, for fundamentally, it is the exchange of Christ for the guilty sinner that makes possible our restoration. [4] Christ's substitutionary sacrifice was necessary in order for God to justly pardon sinners, for God could not simply ignore humanity's flagrant violation of his law. Therefore Christ took our penalty of death in our place, and in doing so satisfied the claims of justice and redeemed us from the curse of the law.[5]

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[3] Knight, *The Cross of Christ*, 61.

[4] Ibid., 71.

[5] Knight is somewhat inconsistent on this point, and he acknowledges as much. Chapter 2 referenced Knight's contention that sin is a personal matter, and thus guilt for it is nontransferable. The descendants of Adam inherit his sinful nature, with all its weaknesses and propensities to sin, but they cannot actually be held guilty for Adam's sinful deeds. Any guilt and any punishment they bear is the result of their own personal sins. When it comes to the sacrifice of Christ, however, Knight argues in the opposite direction: guilt *can* be transferred. In fact, the whole concept of substitution involves the innocent dying for the guilty, which Knight takes as proof that guilt can be transferred from one individual to another. Hence he declares that Christ "took upon himself the dreadful guilt of our sins" (Ibid., 53).

Such an approach to the problem of sin not only seems inadequate (since substitutionary punishment only solves the legal problem of man's standing before the law, without actually changing his nature), but it is also contradictory to the doctrine of sin Knight has established earlier. To be fair, Knight acknowledges the contradiction and admits that he does not know how it is that such a transfer occurred; he knows only that the Bible indicates that it happens (cf. Rom 4:25; 1 Cor 15:1-3; 2 Cor 15:3, 21; Gal 3:13; 1 Pet 2:24, 3:18; Isa 53). Though the Bible maintains that human courts of law are not to hold one person guilty for the sin of another, Christ, says Knight, is the exception to everything else in the Bible; in the atonement, "God does things differently than he told us to do with each other." Knight notes that not all aspects of revelation can be harmonized or rationalized." He adds, "Outside of the fact that it's revelation and that Christ is in a different business than two sinners dealing with each other, I'm not sure we can completely explain it" (Knight interview).

Christ's substitutionary sacrifice accomplishes many results, each corresponding to one of the problems with sin discussed above. It provides justification, by which we are declared legally righteous and our favorable standing with God is restored. It also provides a propitiation, turning away God's wrath from sin. Through the sacrifice of Christ God was able to demonstrate the hideousness of sin and condemn it; thus God's wrath toward human sin is no longer necessary. Further, Christ's death opens the way for reconciliation between God and man, since it removes the obstacles that stand between us (namely, sin and the penalty of the law) and thereby heals the broken relationship. Christ's blood also brings cleansing, by which our moral defilement is washed away. Lastly, it redeems us from the curse of the law, which was the penalty of death, since Christ took our penalty for us.[6]

Christ's substitutionary death to satisfy the demands of justice is the work Christ has done *for* us. But merely redeeming us through an objective work on our behalf was not sufficient: A subjective restoration of the human heart is also necessary. So Christ also works within humanity to effect a transformation of the mind and the will, changing us from rebellious sinners who oppose God's law into

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[6] Knight develops these images of justification, propitiation, reconciliation, redemption, and cleansing in chapter 4, "God in Search of Rebels," of Knight, *The Cross of Christ* (61-80). In his view, these five visual images are all metaphors that the Bible uses to help us understand salvation, but they are not precise descriptions of the nature of salvation, and none of them alone is comprehensive. Further, Knight holds, in keeping with John Stott, that the concept of substitutionary sacrifice is not another metaphor to add to the others; instead, substitution is the foundation of all other metaphors (Knight, *The Cross of Christ*, 62).

individuals who naturally will to do the good and want to live in harmony with God's good government. This is the work he does *in* us.[7]

Justification and Sanctification

Another way of summarizing the multiple aspects of salvation is to divide them, as Knight does, between the biblical concepts of justification and sanctification. Again, the former has to do with God's objective work on our behalf, while the latter has to do with God's subjective work within human hearts.[8] In

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[7] According to Knight, the two processes of justification and sanctification (or regeneration) can be separated only in theory, not in practice. In an individual's life, they necessarily occur together (Knight, *Sin and Salvation*, 81-82 and 90-91).

[8] In some ways, Knight's discussion of justification and the objective aspects of salvation is ironic and potentially problematic. As mentioned above, there are a variety of biblical metaphors used to describe God's objective work on our behalf. However, Knight singles out the metaphor of justification and elevates it above the others when discussing the objective aspects of salvation. He does so on the grounds that justification is one of the most significant metaphors of the New Testament with respect to salvation, and was recognized as central to the biblical doctrine of salvation by figures such as Martin Luther and the Apostle Paul (Ibid., 78).

Knight's elevation of the theme of justification in salvation is intriguing, however, because the metaphor of justification implies that sin is a legal problem and that the solution of Christ's death is legal in nature. However, these assumptions are somewhat inconsistent with the doctrine of sin Knight has developed earlier. After all, as explained in chapter 2, Knight identifies sin primarily as a problem within the human heart, not as a legal matter. The issue with sin is that human beings are rebellious against God's character and his law; their hearts and natures and wills are bent toward evil. This problem does not lie outside human beings (i.e., with the law), but internal to the human person (i.e., in the heart).

If sin is a matter of rebellion, broken relationships, and an evil orientation of human nature, then seemingly the doctrine of salvation should address these issues. Indeed, Knight himself suggests as much: "If the entrance of sin brought alienation and the deterioration of relationships, then the essence of the gospel is rebuilding those relationships. The entire process entails a restoration of the image of God in individuals through the agency of the Holy Spirit" (Knight, *Philosophy and Education*, 207). In contrast with this relational emphasis, however, the metaphor of justification stresses Christ's death as bringing about a change in man's legal

justification, which is a legal metaphor drawing on the imagery of a court of law and which has to do with a declaration of righteousness, Christ deals with the curse of the law that stands against us. He takes our penalty in our stead and accounts to us his perfect obedience to the law, a righteousness that we receive through our faith relationship with him. God thereby acquits us of our guilt, declares us righteous, and sets us back in a right relationship to him.[9] In sanctification, by contrast, he restores the human heart. It is during this process that Christ reshapes our attitudes, reorients our minds, and transforms our wills. Whereas justification deals with the external problems sin creates, sanctification deals with the seat of sin: the human heart. In sanctification, God reforms our characters, thereby rooting out sin at the

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standing before God, forgiveness and pardon for sin, and acquittal from guilt and cancellation of the penalty of death for sin. All of these achievements of Christ's death deal with issues outside human nature; none of them actually get at the central issue of man's heart, his attitude, and his relationships.

At first glance, then, it seems that Knight's doctrine of justification appears irrelevant to his doctrine of sin as explained in chapter 3. Knight does not deal with this contradiction explicitly, but the implicit reconciliation of this irony within his writings is that the problems brought on by sin are manifold (Knight, *The Cross of Christ*, 28-43, 61-80). Sin creates problems both within the human heart and external to it. Therefore, though sin is not wholly or even primarily a legal matter, yet it does involve legal issues (cf. ibid., 54-56). The solution to sin, then, must address *all* the issues raised by sin, not just those internal to the human heart.

[9] Knight, *Sin and Salvation*, 77-79; idem, *The Cross of Christ*, 71-73. As Knight is careful to clarify, justification is a *declaration* of our righteousness, but it does not actually *make* us righteous. On the question of whether or not this declaration of our righteousness is a legal fiction, Knight replies that it is not, because at the same time we exercise faith in Christ and are declared righteous, we experience a new birth and begin the process of regeneration. According to Knight, justification and regeneration (also called sanctification) cannot be separated in practical experience (Knight, *Sin and Salvation*, 79; cf. idem, *The Cross of Christ*, 127).

source.[10] In this manner, God provides both pardon and power—pardon from the penalty of death, and power for a new way of life. He does not merely forgive, but also makes available his resurrection power, by which we are enabled to live as new beings no longer enslaved to sin.[11]

The Role of Human Works

So far, we have discussed God's role in the process of salvation. But what of the human role? Do human beings contribute to their own salvation by some form of good works?

Knight's answer is a resounding no. For him, salvation is purely a matter of grace. His strong emphasis on the sacrifice of Christ means that Knight sees salvation as coming through Christ's work, not through any action of human beings on behalf of themselves. "The very foundation of the gospel," says Knight, "is that salvation rests on what God has done for us in Christ rather than on something we must do for Him."[12] The temptation, he says, is to suppose that there is something we can do to enable God to save us, or make it easier for him to save. The truth, however, is that all human beings are dead in sin and deserve nothing but condemnation. The source of salvation is external to us; there is no possibility of it

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[10] Knight, *Sin and Salvation*, 80-81.

[11] Ibid., 70.

[12] Knight, *Galatians and Ephesians*, 33.

coming from within ourselves, or from our own effort.[13] Thus there is a strong emphasis on salvation as a matter of grace, and as coming from an external source.

Not only can human beings not save themselves, but they also cannot *add* anything to salvation. It would be inaccurate to suggest that salvation involves God doing his part and human beings doing their part. On the contrary, in the context of discussing Paul's condemnation of the Galatian believers for preaching a "different gospel," Knight follows R. Allan Cole's suggestion that the Galatians probably never denied the necessity of believing in Christ as Messiah and Savior.[14] What they *were* doing, however, was telling the Gentiles that accepting Christ's work by faith was necessary but not sufficient for justification. This implication—that Christ's work alone was insufficient for salvation, and that the works of the Galatians had to be added to Christ's work—brought down Paul's harshest criticism. "In short," concludes Knight, "to add anything to grace as God's way of justification is to destroy the very idea of grace itself. From his [Paul's] perspective, God's justification in Christ is not a bargain between Him and human beings, but a gift."[15]

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[13] Knight, *Sin and Salvation*, 67-69; cf. idem, *Philosophy and Education*, 176-177.

[14] R. Allan Cole, quoted in Knight, *Galatians and Ephesians*, 37; cf. Gal 1:6-9.

[15] Knight, *Galatians and Ephesians*, 38. Elsewhere, Knight observes, "The Judaizers held that justification consisted of faith plus circumcision and obedience to the law, a position equivalent to saying that the sacrifice of Christ on Calvary was not enough, that believers must add something to that sacrifice behaviorally." However, Knight adds that "Paul refused to give an inch to such theology" (Ibid., 124).

On the other hand, Knight is equally insistent that human beings do have a role in salvation. That role is the response of faith. After all, though God makes his grace available to all, salvation becomes a reality for us only if we accept it. "On the cross God *provided* salvation for every person, but each person must *accept* it before the provision becomes effective."[16] Thus, though salvation is at God's initiative, and though even faith is a gift from him, we are responsible for using our wills to accept his gift and respond. Our faith response does nothing to merit salvation, but it is still necessary. Knight thus identifies a key role for the human will in the process of salvation.[17]

Though salvation comes by grace alone and not through works, it is nevertheless true, in Knight's view, that faith produces good works. Faith alone saves, but true faith is never alone.[18] Indeed, Knight identifies several aspects of legitimate faith, all of which suggest that faith should bear fruit in a person's behavior: First, faith involves trust in God, meaning that the believer actually believes God's ways are best and makes a conscious choice to rely on him for

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[16] Knight, *Sin and Salvation*, 71.

[17] What of the fact that the freedom of the human will was severely compromised at the Fall, and that the will is bent toward evil? In order to explain how our wills can be enslaved to sin and yet still able to make a choice to accept Christ's salvific work, Knight makes two points, as explained in chapter 3: First, he acknowledges that the human will is impaired, but denies that our freedom of will was completely nullified at the fall. Second, he adopts John Wesley's concept of prevenient grace. Prevenient grace is not in itself saving grace, but rather the "grace before grace" that enables us to make a choice to accept God's offer of salvation (ibid., 73).

[18] Ibid., 107.

salvation. Second, it entails a relationship with God, necessitating that the believer be in communion with God. Finally, it involves a commitment to do God's will, by which the believer signals his or her willingness to live according to the principles God put in place for the orderly operation of the universe, rather than living in rebellion and opposition to them.[19] From these characteristics of faith, it is evident that faith is not passive and cannot involve mere intellectual acceptance of God's gift. On the contrary, faith signals a wholehearted embrace of God's character, government, and way of living, which cannot help but be reflected in a person's lifestyle and actions.

In this sense, faith is transformative. It represents a genuine conviction in the goodness and righteousness of God's ways, and by extension, it represents an identification with Christ's attitude to sin. No longer can the believer view sin as something desirable; no longer can he or she live in willful rebellion against God's principles. Rather, the sinner's attitude will be transformed, such that he or she desires the good, and desires to live in harmony with God's will. Because of his or her identification with the attitude of Christ, any saved individual must of necessity experience life changes. True faith must transform. Thus Knight can say, "the Bible says two important things about human deeds or works: (1) No one earns salvation by them (Gal. 2:16; Eph. 2:8,9), and (2) No one is saved without them (James 2:17-20; Matt. 7:21-27)."[20]

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[19] Knight, *Sin and Salvation*, 71-72.

[20] Knight, *The Cross of Christ*, 130. Knight is self-conscious about appearing antinomian and so is careful to clarify that Christians "are not free from the law.

Not all works are equally good, however. Knight identifies at least three types of works in the Bible that all draw strong condemnation: namely, works of the flesh, works of the law, and dead works.[21] Over against these are the works of faith, which are spoken of approvingly in the Bible. The difference between "good" and "bad" works is that works of faith are the "spontaneous reaction of the 'saved' person," while works of the law are born of a "self-conscious struggle to earn God's favor."[22] Understood properly, good works are not so much something human beings do consciously, but something that happens unpremeditatedly in the life of one living by faith, as naturally and unpremeditatedly as a tree produces fruit.[23] A believer living the life of faith does not do good works in an effort to merit salvation, for he or she understands that "atonement is all of God. . . . The human part in the atonement is that of response . . . rather than that of accomplishment."[24]

Rather, they have a new relationship to it. They no longer see the law as a ladder to get to heaven but as an opportunity to love God and other people. . . .They no longer obey the law in an effort to get saved. Instead, they keep God's law because they are saved." Further, "their observance of it is on the basis of love rather than legal obligation" (Knight, *Galatians and Ephesians*, 130).

[21] Knight, *Sin and Salvation*, 109.

[22] Ibid., 110. Regarding the emphasis of 1 John on righteous living, Knight comments, "John is in harmony with the rest of the New Testament in his view of the relationship between identity and good living. For him *conduct does not determine relationship. Rather relationship determines conduct*. Thus the central fact is that Christians are children of God and, as such, will act the part rather than imitating the evil one" (Knight, *John and Jude*, 96).

[23] Sanctification, according to Knight, is the work of the Holy Spirit—not human beings themselves (Knight, *Sin and Salvation*, 105).

[24] Knight, *The Cross of Christ*, 142.

The preceding discussion might imply that the role of human beings is largely passive when it comes to salvation: We have to exercise faith, but God does everything else, including produce the works that flow from faith. Knight argues, however, that it is inaccurate to picture the human role as passive. After all, the Bible repeatedly pictures believers in a very active role of struggling against sin and against the flesh. In other words, Christians are not asked merely to wait for Christ to transform them as they sit in an easy chair; rather, they are called to strive against sin. Knight claims that he used to teach that the sum of the Christian's responsibility was merely to "stay surrendered," yet realized his error after noticing that the Bible is full of implications that human beings are to invest effort in their own transformation.[25] As Knight points out, neither physical nor spiritual growth happens automatically. There are certain things one must *do* for spiritual growth such as Bible study or prayer, in the same way that one must eat food in order to grow physically.[26] Thus he observes, "*There is a passive and an active element in our walk with God. First comes surrender, then comes Spirit-empowered action that requires human effort.*"[27] To be clear, there is no efficacy in human effort apart from God; the biblical "picture is rather one of cooperation between God and human

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[25] Knight, *Sin and Salvation*, 111.

[26] Ibid., 116. Each such activity is a means of grace and a means of growth. Yet Knight is careful to clarify that "the means of grace only function as means of grace within a faith relationship enlivened and empowered by God's Spirit" (*Ibid.*, 118).

[27] Ibid., 112, italics original.

beings."[28] Knight concludes, then, that in the biblical view of salvation, Jesus does not "do it all." Instead, salvation occurs synergistically as human beings *cooperate* with God. "Human effort is important and needed. While such effort does not lead to salvation, it certainly flows from it."[29]

That said, any mention of human striving is prone to serious misinterpretation, as Knight is well aware. When confronted with the fact that human beings must cooperate with God in salvation, it is easy to assume that our cooperation arises out of our own power. Thus the tendency is to fall back into the pattern of trying to add to Christ's work. In an effort to combat this pitfall, Knight is careful to note that there are two distinctly different ways of understanding how sanctification works. On one hand, Christians can approach sanctification and the pursuit of good works with the intention of becoming increasingly independent of Christ, in the hope of becoming so much like God that they will one day be able to stand on their own without Christ. Alternatively, they can approach the subject from the perspective that they must be increasingly dependent on Christ. The latter is, for Knight, the biblical approach.[30] Believers should in no way think that their maturity in sanctification will leave them less needful of Christ; on the contrary, their growth in grace will make them ever more aware of their need, and ever more desirous of placing their lives fully into his hands. Thus, a believer's struggle against sin and

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[28] Knight, *Sin and Salvation*, 111.

[29] Ibid., 113.

[30] Ibid., 106.

struggle to produce good works should never be understood as one in which the believer is independently engaged, or in which he or she is adding anything to what Christ has accomplished. Rather, any successes in the struggle against sin are as a result of the believer's ever-increasing reliance on Christ and his power.

This fact is very important for understanding the constant New Testament imperative for Christians to imitate Christ. At first glance, these directives would seem to indicate that believers can achieve transformation and sanctification merely by mimicking Christ. Based on these New Testament commands, some theologians, such as Pelagius in the fifth century, have adopted a view of salvation that assumes that Christ's mission was merely to provide an example of perfection for us to imitate. Such theologians assume that if we merely follow the example Christ set, we can overcome sin just as he did. According to Knight, however, Pelagius's belief was "based on the teaching that Adam's original sin had not bent the human will toward evil. Therefore, because people were born without a bias toward sin, they could live the sinless life by following the example of Christ."[31] Those who, like Pelagius, see Christ primarily as our example and assume that human beings are capable of good works merely because of Christ's moral influence underestimate the magnitude and extent of the sin problem. While it is true that we are called to imitate the example of Christ, it is imperative to recognize that human beings cannot do this through their own power, but only as they rely on the power Christ himself imparts. Christ is first and foremost our savior, not just our example (though he is an example as

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[31] Knight, *Sin and Salvation*, 125.

well).[32] We experience freedom of sin not through mimicking Christ as much as through abiding in Christ, as branches in a vine.[33]

One final aspect of the subject of good works merits clarification, and that is the place of works in the final judgment.[34] As Knight notes, the Bible is clear that human beings are somehow judged based on their works. This would seem to imply that our salvation is tied to our own merit, and is based on whether or not we have the right behaviors. But such a view is a misunderstanding, according to Knight. The intent of the final judgment is merely to determine who is in Christ; the judgment is a "relational evaluation," in Knight's view.[35] During the judgment, we are evaluated on our attitude toward and response to God's grace. Thus, believers are not saved by works, but are merely judged by them. The difference is that works do not merit salvation, but only provide evidence of whether the believer has accepted the justifying and sanctifying grace of God. Our works are merely the evidence of our orientation, but never the basis of our salvation. Salvation is still based on grace alone.

In sum, then, Knight's view of the relationship between faith and works is that salvation is a gift of grace, pure and simple. No human accomplishment can add anything to Christ's work or make it easier for God to save us. Human beings are

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[32] Knight, *Sin and Salvation,* 125.

[33] J. M. Campbell, quoted in Knight, *The Cross of Christ*, 133.

[34] Knight, *Sin and Salvation*, 113-114.

[35] Ibid., 114.

saved by faith alone. Yet faith is never alone, for it effects a change in attitude and orientation, which of necessity will impact the believer's life and produce good works. Indeed, believers are called to actively strive against sin. This struggle and the good works that result from it, however, are the fruit of salvation, never its ground.

The Tension of Salvation: Already Accomplished, Not Yet Accomplished

One of the paradoxes of salvation is the fact that the Bible describes salvation as an accomplished fact, and yet the results of salvation often seem far from obvious in daily life. Believers, even those with genuine faith, still experience the tug of sin, still struggle with temptation, still experience corrupted desires, still wrestle with the habits and ways of life that defined them before conversion. Indeed, Knight observes that the Bible often pictures converted believers as at war with the forces of evil.[36] Obviously, though the provision for salvation may already have been made, and though there is a sense in which a believer can be said to be saved immediately upon conversion, there is another sense in which salvation is decidedly not finished. Knight explains, "The Bible teaches that the new Christian has a new relationship to God and a new mind, heart, and set of attitudes toward sin and righteousness. But, on the other hand, the newly baptized person also continues to exist in the same

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[36] Knight, *Sin and Salvation*, 100-101; cf. Gal 5:16-17; Eph 4:27; 2 Cor 6:7; 1 Tim 6:12; 2 Tim 2:3; 1 Pet 5:8; Jas 4:7; 6:10-17; Rev 2:7, 11, 17, 26; 3:5, 12, 21.

body. . . . And therein lies a problem—a tension between the old and the new."[37] Saving faith produces an immediate result, yet other results, such as transformation of character, are often very slow in coming. Thus we are confronted with the paradox inherent in salvation: It is already accomplished, but not yet accomplished.

In order to explain this tension, Knight seeks to clarify exactly what happens at the moment of initial conversion. According to his view, the change that takes place at conversion is one of orientation, not immediate transformation. "What takes place at conversion is a complete change of spiritual direction, rather than an immediate transformation of habit patterns. That shift is a gradual process."[38] Indeed, although initial salvation results in (or comes as a result of) a change in allegiance and a new desire to do God's will, conversion does not instantly alter established habits or remove well-cultivated sinful tendencies.[39] It also does not eradicate the influence of corrupted physical bodies, which continue to wreak havoc on the believer's desire to do good.[40]

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[37] Knight, *Sin and Salvation*, 100. Regarding Rom 7, in which Paul speaks of being a slave to sin and being compelled by it to do what he does not want to do, Knight comments, "All Christians identify with this passage on a psychological level. No believer is completely without sin. We are all caught in the tension" (Knight, *Romans*, 181). On Paul's specific description of himself as "sold under sin," Knight remarks, "That phrase at the very least reflects a periodically recurring residue of the slavery to sin that once ruled him all the time, a slavery that led him at times to do what he knew to be wrong" (ibid., 182).

[38] Knight, *Sin and Salvation*, 102.

[39] Ibid., 102.

[40] Paul speaks in Rom 6:7 of believers being "freed from sin." Writing on this verse, Knight observes that many people suppose based on Paul's statement that a Christian should be insensible and immovable in the presence of temptation

Because of this fact, Knight separates both justification and sanctification into separate stages. Whereas justification is often thought of as taking place instantaneously at the moment of conversion and sanctification is often thought to take place over the believer's entire lifespan, Knight sees both as having an instantaneous aspect as well as a continuous aspect. With respect to justification, he suggests that believers are immediately justified at the moment of conversion. Yet since corrupted tendencies will continue to plague the believer, he or she will continue to sin, even if unwillfully, and continual sin necessitates continual, daily justification. Thus the believer who in faith turns to God is "set right" (justified), not just once, but repeatedly, after each fall.[41]

Similarly, though sanctification is often thought of as continuing over the course of the believer's life, Knight suggests that it has an instantaneous aspect. The word "sanctify" means to "set apart," an act which Knight argues takes place at the moment of conversion. New believers are indeed set apart in that moment, and their orientation and attitude with respect to God's law and to sin are immediately changed. In this sense, sanctification is the work of a moment. However, because we continue to feel the pull of the flesh, and because old habits continue to persist,

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following conversion. But Knight identifies several problems with that thesis: First, Christ experienced real temptation (Matt 4). Second, all other humans identify with Christ in the experience of temptation. Third, Paul says in Rom 6:12 not to let sin "*reign.*" We should not assume, then, that human beings will be free from all experience of temptation, or all experience of sin. When Paul speaks of being "freed from sin," he "is not talking about being unable to respond to sin, but rather to being unable to live a life of sin. . . . John Wesley captured the truth of what Paul is saying when he wrote that 'sin *remains* but no longer *reigns*'" (Knight, *Romans*, 153).

[41] Knight, *Sin and Salvation*, 87-88.

there is a sense in which sanctification must continue, and it is thus right to say that human beings are "being sanctified" throughout their lives. Then there is also a sense in which final sanctification—the full perfection of sanctification in the life of the Christian—will not take place until the end of this age, when believers are taken to heaven, glorified, and given new and uncorrupted bodies. Thus, there are three stages or levels of sanctification: initial, progressive, and final sanctification.[42]

Summary of Knight's Doctrine of Salvation

As demonstrated in chapter 3, Knight understands sin as multifaceted and as having multiple effects. These various aspects of sin necessitate a robust doctrine of salvation that can speak to each of the problems associated with sin. Thus Knight has a multifaceted understanding of the process of salvation, and he is careful to emphasize both its objective and its subjective aspects. Christ does a work *for* believers; he also does a work *in* believers. Through and through, this work is an act of grace on God's part, for humanity is entirely helpless. Though we must respond in faith to God's offer of salvation, there is nothing we can do to merit it, or to add to it. It is Christ alone who provides both pardon from and power over sin.

That said, however, it is impossible to have saving faith without such faith effecting a transformation in human life. After all, faith involves a trusting relationship with God and implicitly involves an identification with how God feels about sin. When converted, the believer no longer has a desire to be in rebellion against God's laws, but rather recognizes the goodness of God's principles of

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[42] Knight, *Sin and Salvation*, 88-90.

government and wishes to live in harmony with them. Thus conversion must involve a change in orientation. This change in orientation, however, should not be thought to involve a complete transformation of the believer in the sense that he or she is no longer liable to sin. On the contrary, initial justification and sanctification produce a change in the believer's attitude and orientation, but they do not destroy sinful tendencies or immediately do away with sinful habits or traits of character. Believers will still continue to wrestle with sin and will continue to commit individual acts of transgression.

Implications for the Doctrine of Perfection

Given Knight's understanding of the nature of sin and the nature of salvation, the next question to be asked is, To what extent is it possible to overcome sin and achieve perfection? M. L. Andreasen, in keeping with some early Adventist theologians and other Christian theologians before them, thought perfection was indeed possible—even necessary—for the final generation left living on this earth. However, Andreasen's conclusion was based on what Knight would term an inadequate doctrine of sin. With Knight's expanded view of sin, what are the ramifications for the doctrine of perfection?

Knight's first point regarding the notion of perfection is that it is a very biblical concept. He acknowledges that the Bible treats perfection as both possible and expected; thus, "*the only thing one can conclude from the Bible is that perfection must be possible, or its writers would not have urged it upon believers.*"[43] The two

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[43] Knight, *Sin and Salvation*, 38, italics original.

questions to be answered, however, are what exactly is the *nature* of this perfection, and *when* will Christians be able to achieve it? On the answers to these questions, Knight differs strongly from other theologians such as Andreasen.

As Knight notes, the paradox with respect to perfection and sinlessness is that the Bible treats both as possible, yet simultaneously denies the possibility of attaining either. As examples of the biblical indications that perfection is possible, Knight points to Hebrews, which enjoins us to "go on unto perfection" (6:1), as well as to the book of 1 John, which states that "no one who abides in him sins. . . . No one born of God commits sin; for God's nature abides in him, and he cannot sin because he is born of God" (3:6, 9).[44] On the other hand, the same epistle of John states elsewhere that "if we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves" (1 John 1:8).[45] The contradictory nature of the biblical evidence implies that there is some sense in which perfection can be attained, and another sense in which it cannot.

To explain this paradox, Knight suggests that the Bible has different meanings for the terms "sin," "sinlessness," and "perfection." Honing in on John's usage of the terms in his first epistle, Knight observes that some sins are "unto death," while others are "not unto death" (1 John 5:16). The difference, he suggests,

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[44] Knight, *Sin and Salvation*, 144.

[45] Ibid.; cf. Knight, *John and Jude*, 103-104; 1 John 1:8-2:1. Writing on Rom 3:22-23, Knight observes that these two verses imply that there is ongoing sin in the life of all human beings, apparently regardless of their state of salvation: "The verb tenses in today's verse may have a lesson for us. All 'have sinned' is a Greek aorist that pictures sinning as being in humanity's past. But that doesn't mean that sin is merely universal in the past. The next verb, 'fall short,' is in the present tense, reflecting a continual process. Thus the sin problem is truly universal in both historic time and space" (idem, *Romans*, 83).

is in the attitude of the sinner.[46] Sins unto death are those sins committed habitually, out of an attitude of rebellion. Sins not unto death are those committed by believers who do not wish to rebel against God's law, but who still transgress out of ignorance or because of the weakness of their natures, which are still mortal and corruptible. If this distinction between different types of sins is accurate, it is the best explanation for what John has in mind when he calls for sinlessness: He views a person as sinless if the individual's will, attitude, and motivation are loyal to Christ, regardless of whether or not he or she continues to commit particular acts of sin. In other words, it is possible to be "sinless" if a believer is sinless in heart, even if not sinless in action.[47]

As added support for this thesis, Knight points to the fact that John draws on the metaphor of "walking" to depict two alternative ways of life. Some individuals walk in the light, others walk in darkness (1 John 1:6-7; cf. 2:6). The first way of life is the way of SIN, involving rebellion against God; the other is the way of faith. "*Those in this second group John defines as being sinless, even though they still commit*

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[46] Knight's reasoning is based on John's verb tenses: Every time the epistle of 1 John demands sinlessness, the verb "to sin" is in the present tense, indicating continual or habitual action. When John demands sinlessness, he is therefore demanding the cessation of continual, habitual sin. On the other hand, when he speaks of a Mediator who will intercede for us on those occasions when we do sin, the verb "to sin" is in the aorist tense, indicating action at a particular point in time. In other words, mediation is available when the sin in question is not habitual or continual action. John thus appears to see a difference between cherished sins and uncherished sins (Knight, *John and Jude*, 104).

[47] Knight, *Sin and Salvation*, 145; cf. idem, *John and Jude*, 50-58.

specific acts of sin for which they need forgiveness."[48] The issue is not so much whether an individual stumbles and falls, but which path that individual is on, and which direction he or she is headed. Those who "walk" in the way of life can be described as "sinless," even if they still sin.

A similar nuancing can be detected in Paul's use of the term perfection. In one context, Paul describes himself and some Philippian believers as already "perfect," but earlier in the same passage Paul denies that he has reached perfection (Phil 3:15, 12). According to Knight, Paul's intention in making this distinction is to convey that he and the Philippians are already perfect in attitude, yet they are still being formed into a more perfect state. Based on this understanding, Knight suggests that perfection is "a dynamic state in which dedicated Christians continue to advance in Christian living."[49] When the Bible calls us to perfection, it has in mind a state of being, a state of relationship, and an orientation, rather than a point of absolute perfection and complete sinlessness. In this manner, Knight draws a distinction between "perfection of attitude versus perfection of action."[50] Biblically,

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[48] Knight, *Sin and Salvation*, 145, italics original; cf. idem, *John and Jude*, 105.

[49] Knight, *Sin and Salvation*, 146. The idea of perfection as a static, unchanging absolute is a Platonic idea inherited from the Greeks, but not a biblical concept, according to Knight (ibid., 140).

[50] Ibid., 148. Like John, Paul denies that Christians can continue in sin (Rom 6:2). According to Knight, however, "Paul is not saying that converted people never commit acts of sin. Rather, he means that they do not live a life oriented toward sin. . . . They no longer love sin. Recognizing its destructive nature, they want to live the principles of God. But they also know that when they do sin they can turn to the Father, who has abundant grace" (Knight, *Romans*, 147). Like the apostle John again, Paul employs the metaphor of walking to describe the direction of human life, suggesting that Christians cannot continue to "walk" in the same path as they did before salvation (Rom 6:4). But Paul is not calling for sinlessness; rather, he is

"perfection" is a term to describe the state of those who are perfectly submitted to Christ and perfectly desirous of doing his will, regardless of whether or not they continue to commit individual acts of transgression. Indeed, the Bible does not associate perfection with sinlessness, but rather with mercy, love, and maturity;[51] thus Knight writes that "biblical perfection is not the abstract standard of flawlessness found in Greek philosophy," but rather a perfect relationship of love with God and other human beings.[52]

Not only does biblical perfection refer to a perfect relationship rather than a state of absolute sinlessness, it is also clear from the Bible that perfection is a relative state. This is evidenced in the illustration above of Paul and the Thessalonian believers, who were "perfect," but still on their way to fuller perfection. This indicates that as individuals progress on the path of obedience, their capacity for perfection increases.[53] Their knowledge grows, they form new habits, and they become increasingly able to achieve perfection in action as well as in attitude. Yet the fact that we continue to have sinful natures on this earth should dissuade us from thinking that we will ever arrive at perfection in an absolute sense.

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noting that "it is impossible for them [Christians] to tread the path of sin as a way of life" (Knight, *Romans*, 149).

[51] Knight, *Sin and Salvation*, 143; cf. Matt 5:43-48, 19:21; Heb 5:13-6:1; 1 John 4:8.

[52] Knight, *Sin and Salvation*, 143.

[53] Ibid., 139.

The biblical picture is that believers are to be continually growing in perfection, not striving to achieve a particular *point* of perfection.[54]

In a sense, then, Knight denies the possibility of full perfection on this earth. One of the reasons for this denial is the fact that absolute sinlessness would mean that believers would be free not only from known sins of commission, but would also be free from sins of ignorance and sins of omission. Such an achievement is impossible, according to Knight, as long as we still retain corruptible natures. "Those who so glibly demand [absolute sinlessness] of themselves and others usually define sin as merely avoiding conscious acts of rebellion against God," but this definition is shortsighted.[55] Those who assume the possibility of full perfection on earth fail to take into consideration other types of sin, and thus their understanding of perfection is flawed.

Rather than focusing on avoiding particular sins of commission, Knight suggests that our focus in the pursuit of perfection ought to be elsewhere. Biblically, perfection is not the absence of sin, but the attainment of righteousness; it is "a positive rather than a negative quality."[56] This explains why the Bible ties perfection to such qualities as love, mercy, and justice rather than mere sinlessness. It is when we have adopted these characteristics that we have become perfect. Indeed, Knight goes so far as to suggest that the very definition of perfection is perfect love. With

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[54] Knight, *Sin and Salvation*, 138-139.

[55] Ibid., 147.

[56] Knight, *Sin and Salvation*, 142.

John Wesley, he holds that "*pure love reigning alone in the heart and life,—this is the whole of Scriptural perfection*."[57] Perfect love is what humanity lost at Adam's Fall, and perfection comes as we regain what was lost there. Thus, "perfection in the present life is a perfect attitude toward God and other people while one is in a faith relationship to God," a view which "does not demand absolutely perfect performance."[58] Since both Wesley and Knight stress an ethical-relational view of sin over a legal view, they are able to see sin primarily as intentional rejection of God's will rather than as deviation in any point from the law. Righteousness and perfection, in consequence, are also understood as ethical-relational ideas.[59] The point of perfection, then, has little or nothing to do with lifestyle issues such as circumcision and eating meat offered to idols, as some of the Jewish Christians thought; it also has nothing to do with dietary restrictions and long lists of rules for Sabbath keeping, as modern Christians sometimes suppose.[60] Instead, perfection is about perfect love of God and perfect love of one's neighbor.

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[57] Knight, *Sin and Salvation*, 152, italics supplied by Knight. Writing on the biblical concept of imitating God and seeking after his perfection, Knight observes that in most areas, we cannot imitate God. For example, we are incapable of matching his glory, his eternal existence, his omnipotence, or other such characteristics. "It is in the moral realm that we can be like God. More specifically, according to Ephesians 5:2, it is in the area of love that we may reflect Him" (Knight, *Galatians and Ephesians*, 263-264).

[58] Knight, *Sin and Salvation*, 152.

[59] Ibid.

[60] Though some Christians fear that emphasizing growth in love over lifestyle and behavioral issues will result in moral laxity, Knight insists that focusing on perfection as *love* rather than *lifestyle* is actually a far more stringent standard: "It is possible to get the victory over diet and bad habits, but it is quite another thing to

In general, then, just as Knight's doctrine of sin focused primarily on "SIN" (as an attitude and a state of rebellion) rather than acts of sin, his doctrines of sanctification, perfection, and righteousness focus on "RIGHTEOUSNESS" (as an attitude and state of faith) rather than on particular righteous acts. As Knight avoids what he calls the Pharisaic understanding of sin, so he avoids the Pharisaic understanding of righteousness, which, in his view, focused primarily on behavior. He explains, "Whereas the Pharisees saw righteousness, sanctification, and perfection in terms of a series of actions, Christ saw those items from the perspective of a total transformation of heart and mind. If the heart and mind were transformed in love, then righteous acts in the daily life would be the natural fruit."[61] He depicts the correct relationship visually as follows:

RIGHTEOUSNESS > righteous actions

Thus the focus in sanctification should not be on doing sanctified acts, but on having a sanctified heart.

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love all one's enemies all the time and to pray on a regular basis for those who despitefully use us (see Matt. 5:43, 44; Gal. 5:14, 22-24). One of the tragic paradoxes of the Pharisees of all ages is that by uplifting behaviors and rules they have actually lowered the requirements of God's law of love" (Knight, *Galatians and Ephesians*, 42).

[61] Knight, *Sin and Salvation*, 186.

Ellen White on Perfection

How does Knight respond to Ellen White's statements about perfection? As he recognizes, White has a very high view of character perfection. Like the Bible, she treats perfection as both possible and expected, declaring that "those who say that it is not possible to live a perfect life throw upon God the imputation of injustice and untruth."[62] According to White, the matter of character perfection will become crucial just before Christ's second advent. For example, she states that during the coming crisis of the end of time,

> *All will be called to choose between the law of God and the laws of men*. Here the dividing line will be drawn. *There will be but two classes. Every character will be fully developed; and all will show whether they have chosen the side of loyalty or that of rebellion*.
>
> Only then will the end come.[63]

Her most frequently cited passage on the subject, and the one that inspired Andreasen's thinking on the topic of perfection, reads, "Christ is waiting with longing desire for the manifestation of Himself in His church. *When the character of Christ shall be perfectly reproduced* in His people, then He will come to claim them as His own."[64] Thus Knight remarks, "Ellen White repeatedly links character

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[62] White, *The Great Controversy*, 489, quoted in Knight, *Sin and Salvation*, 158; cf. White, *The Desire of Ages*, 311; idem, "The Need of Self-Surrender," *Review and Herald*, 7 February 1957, 30.

[63] White, *The Desire of Ages*, 763, quoted in Knight, *Sin and Salvation*, 173-174, italics supplied by Knight.

[64] White, *Christ's Object Lessons*, 69, quoted in Knight, *Sin and Salvation*, 175, italics supplied by Knight.

development with Christ's second coming." In fact, "that connection is so prominent that we can think of it as a theme in her writings."[65]

Yet as Knight also notes, White indicates that human beings will never match the perfection of Christ. While we are to strive for perfection, and while this perfection is attainable in some sense, we should not expect to achieve the absolute sinlessness of Christ.[66] Like the Bible writers, then, she both affirms and denies the possibility of perfection. Knight's proposed key to reconciling these discrepancies is much the same as the solution for reconciling the statements of the New Testament writers on sin and perfection: He suggests that White has a complex view of perfection and sinlessness and does not necessarily view them in terms of absolute sinlessness. Indeed, she treats "perfection as a dynamic, ongoing process," in which there is endless possibility for further growth. [67] As White herself writes, "At every stage of development our life may be perfect; yet if God's purpose for us is fulfilled, there will be continual advancement."[68] Based on such statements, Knight maintains that White, like the Bible writers, understands perfection and sinlessness more as

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[65] Knight, *Sin and Salvation*, 174.

[66] Ibid., 160-161.

[67] Ibid., 161. "*Even the most perfect Christian may increase continually in the knowledge and love of God*" (Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church* [Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1948], 1:340, quoted in Knight, *Sin and Salvation,* 162, italics supplied by Knight).

[68] White*, Christ's Object Lessons*, 65, quoted in Knight, *Sin and Salvation*, 162. For similar statements on the possibility of sinlessness, see Ellen G. White, "Behold! What Manner of Love!," *Review and Herald*, 27 September 1906, 8; idem, "Satan's Rebellion," *Signs of the Times*, 23 July 1902, 3; idem, "The Whole Duty of Man," *Signs*

an attitude than as an absolute. The state of perfection is the state of perfect loyalty, the state of having renounced all cherished sin.[69]

Perfection of the Last Generation

Though Knight denies the possibility of absolute sinlessness in this life, he is well aware that both the Bible and the writings of White make plain that perfection will be a particular issue at the very end of time, just before the second Advent of Christ. From his reading of Revelation and its description of the 144,000 sealed with the seal of God on their foreheads, Knight concludes that the "end-time people possess some sort of perfection that Scripture appears to emphasize because it is an out-of-the-ordinary historical experience."[70] In those final days of earth's history, neutrality will not be an option; the crisis of the end time will create a polarization such that every individual will have to make a firm choice for one of two sides.[71] At this point, it will be perfectly plain which individuals are loyal to Christ and which are opposed to his principles and government.

Knight in no way denies the importance of perfection for this last generation; he denies, however, that the type of perfection they will achieve will be any different in kind than the perfection achieved by any other generation. Following Kenneth Strand, Knight maintains that the experience of the last generation will be unique in

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of the Times, 16 May 1895, 4; idem, "Abide in Me," *Signs of the Times*, 23 March 1888, 178.

[69] Knight, *Sin and Salvation*, 162-167.

[70] Ibid., 170.

[71] Ibid., 171.

magnitude, but not unique in kind.[72] In other words, the intensity of those last days will make the polarization between God and his enemies more clear and more extreme than at earlier points in history, which will force all human beings to make a clear and obvious choice between the two. The characters of those who pledge their allegiance to Christ will be "perfect," but only in the same sense as Knight has already defined perfection: They will be perfect in attitude, loyalty, orientation, and character. "Those Christians living through that unprecedented period of earth's history will be done with rebellion (SIN) against God. Their allegiance and dedication to Him will be 'spotless,' 'without fault,' and perfect."[73] Thus, the crucial issue for that generation, as well as all previous generations, will be where an individual's loyalty lies, not necessarily whether or not that person has fully and finally overcome all instances of sin in his or her life and reached absolute perfection.

In fact, the perfection of the last days, according to Knight, has little to do with lifestyle, behaviors, or actions. Though all these will be affected, the essence of perfection in the final days will have to do with character. For this reason, Knight expresses regret over the fact that "too much Adventist talk of character perfection deals with lifestyle rather than character itself."[74] Unfortunately, focusing on matters of lifestyle and behavior misses the point. It tends to breed legalism and

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[72] Knight, *Sin and Salvation*, 172.

[73] Kenneth Strand, quoted in ibid.

[74] Knight, *Sin and Salvation*, 176.

produce a "'pickle faced' perfection" born of cold, joyless, and exacting attempts at sinlessness.[75] The central question at issue in the last days, according to Knight, will be whether or not one has adopted a character of love. "The perfect Christian," he says, "is the caring Christian," the one who loses himself in service for others.[76] Love is and will be the central issue in determining perfection both now and in the last days; the one whose life is characterized by perfect love is the one who has reached Christ-like perfection.[77]

Summary of Knight's Doctrine of Perfection

The paradox of perfection, for Knight, is that the Bible and the writings of Ellen White assume that perfection is both possible and impossible at the same time. On the one hand, they expect Christians to pursue and attain sinlessness; on the other hand, they deny that sinlessness is possible. The reconciliation of this

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[75] Knight, *Sin and Salvation*, 177.

[76] Ibid., 176.

[77] What, then, of the statements of Ellen White that those in the last days will be able to stand before God without a mediator? Andreasen made much of such statements, arguing that they indicate that the last generation will be perfectly spotless and sinless. How else could they stand before God without any mediatorial intercession? Knight, however, understands these statements in a different light. In his view, the reason that individuals will not have a mediator is because Christ's high priestly mediatorial ministry will be concluded. All the cases of all individuals on earth through history will have been decided; probation will have been closed; the final decision of every human person with respect to salvation will have been made. The absence of a mediator at that point will signal, not that saved individuals have reached a point of absolute perfection, but that probation has been closed and the mediatorial work of Christ is concluded. Thus, according to Knight, White's statements about the final generation facing God without a mediator do not in any way indicate that the last generation will have achieved absolute sinlessness (ibid., 177-183).

dilemma, for Knight is found in the fact that there are multiple understandings of perfection and sinlessness in play. When White and the Bible writers speak of believers pursuing and achieving perfection, they do not have in mind absolute perfection, but rather purity of motive, attitude, and intent. Perfection, for them, is associated with perfect love, mercy, and justice. On the other hand, when they deny the possibility of perfection, they mean to convey the fact that absolute sinlessness is impossible. As long as we dwell on earth in corruptible bodies, we will continue to struggle with the pull of the flesh, and we will continue to fall into individual acts of transgression. Even apart from conscious sin, we are bound to sin unconsciously simply because of ignorance. The difference between those who are perfect and those who are not does not have to do with the fact that some continue to sin and some have overcome sin altogether; rather, the difference has to do with the individual's attitude and orientation. Those who "walk" (that is, orient their lives) in harmony with God's principles are perfect, in spite of the fact that they continue to stumble. They are already perfect, and will continue to be more fully perfected as they grow in the knowledge of Christ and his grace.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

Having examined Knight's understanding of sin, salvation, and perfection in detail, it is now appropriate to step back to address how his perspective differs from alternatives. As stated at the outset of this study, one's view of sin has a direct impact on one's understanding of salvation and the possibility of perfection. That is decidedly true in the case of George Knight, who has attempted to chart a middle course between the two "extreme" historical Christian views of sin surveyed in chapter 2. As demonstrated in chapters 3 and 4, Knight's moderate view on sin has led him to a moderate view on the topics of salvation and perfection.

Because of their severe understanding of the nature of the Fall and its consequences for the human race, such theologians as Augustine and the Reformers held that salvation was solely a work of God; the human role is purely passive. Furthermore, it is impossible to overcome sinful tendencies because of the corruption that lingers in human nature even after conversion. Knight, however, takes a different approach. Unlike Augustinian theologians, he argues that the human will plays a role in salvation, and that although humans can contribute nothing to their own salvation, their responsive cooperation with God's grace is a necessary aspect of salvation. Additionally, he suggests that perfection is both possible and necessary, in a limited sense. Though he denies the possibility of

complete sinlessness in this life, he understands the Bible as calling for both perfection and sinlessness, and therefore accepts both as genuine possibilities.

In this sense, Knight shares much in common with both Pelagius and M. L. Andreasen, for all have a strong belief in the potential for overcoming sin. Nevertheless, much of Knight's writing on sin and salvation is a direct reaction to their views. In particular, Knight has strong differences with Andreasen. The significance of the implications of Knight's doctrine of sin for the doctrines of salvation and perfection will be illustrated most forcefully through a brief summary comparison of his theology with the theology of Andreasen.

Andreasen, as shown in chapter 2, tends to understand sin as particular acts of transgression against God's law; such transgressions can take the form of deeds, words, or even thoughts. Andreasen is not strictly behaviorally focused, because he understands that sin can occur in the mind apart from any outward action (as in the inward sins of covetousness and jealousy). However, Andreasen nevertheless tends to view sin in terms of specific instances of transgression. Within his view, then, salvation has to do with freedom from sinning, and perfection is achieved when the individual no longer transgresses the law in thought, word, or deed. Perfection, then, means reaching a point of absolute sinlessness. Such a perfection is possible in Andreasen's view because he sees sin as having altered human nature only minimally. The effects of Adam's fall did not destroy human beings' capacity to choose against sin, and thus it is possible for humanity to overcome sin in the flesh in the same way Christ did and attain in this life to the same perfection Christ had.

Knight, on the other hand, sees sin as a much more extensive problem than does Andreasen. As we have seen, Knight tends to define sin not only in terms of individual acts of transgression, but also (in fact, primarily) as willful rebellion against God's character and his government. The effects of such a rebellion are manifold, and include a fundamental alteration of human nature, such that human beings no longer have the capacity not to sin. Accordingly, Knight tends to see salvation in terms of reconciliation and transformation: An individual who is saved experiences a change of orientation, such that he or she is no longer antagonistic to God's character and law, but rather desires instead to live in conformity with God's ways. Salvation does not, however, mean that an individual no longer commits any individual acts of transgression. After all, sin has so deeply affected human nature that we cannot escape its clutches entirely. We are still susceptible to sins of ignorance and sins of omission, and our fallen natures will also continue to drag us into known sin on occasion. The point, however, is that an individual who has experienced God's saving grace no longer desires to sin, but is identified with God's attitude toward sin. He is saved, not from sins, but from SIN. Within this model, perfection does not equate to perfect sinlessness, but rather to perfect love, perfect loyalty, and perfect renunciation of all cherished sin. Perfection is a matter of attitude and orientation, not action. Thus an individual can be perfect even though he or she continues to commit particular acts of sin, such as sins of ignorance or sins of omission. He or she is not perfect in act, but is perfect in will and intent.

Clearly, then, an individual's understanding of sin has significant ramifications for his or her theology of salvation and perfection. Andreasen, like

Pelagius before him, has a comparatively mild understanding of the effects of sin on human nature, leading him to embrace the possibility of absolute perfection; Knight, in contrast, has a stronger concept of sin's corrupting effects on human nature. Though he does not embrace the full severity of Augustine's and the Reformers' views, particularly with respect to inherited guilt, Knight recognizes the strength of inherited sinful tendencies toward sin, and his understanding of the damaging effects of sin on human nature prevents him from espousing any possiblity of absolute sinlessness on this earth. Further, whereas Andreasen and Pelagius tend to focus on overcoming particular sinful habits and weaknesses (which in turn tends to encourage a focus on lifestyle and behavior), Knight underlines the significance of a wholesale change in orientation (leading him to focus more on a person's will, intent, and attitude than on lifestyle or particular behaviors).

Obviously, the starting points for each theologian, namely their understandings of the nature of sin, its effects on human nature, and the inheritance received from Adam, lead to fundamentally different end points in their conceptions of salvation, sanctification, and perfection. Knight's concept of sin, which attempts to find a balance between severe and mild views of sin, leads him to an equally moderate view of salvation and perfection.

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